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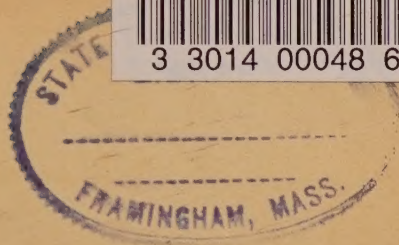
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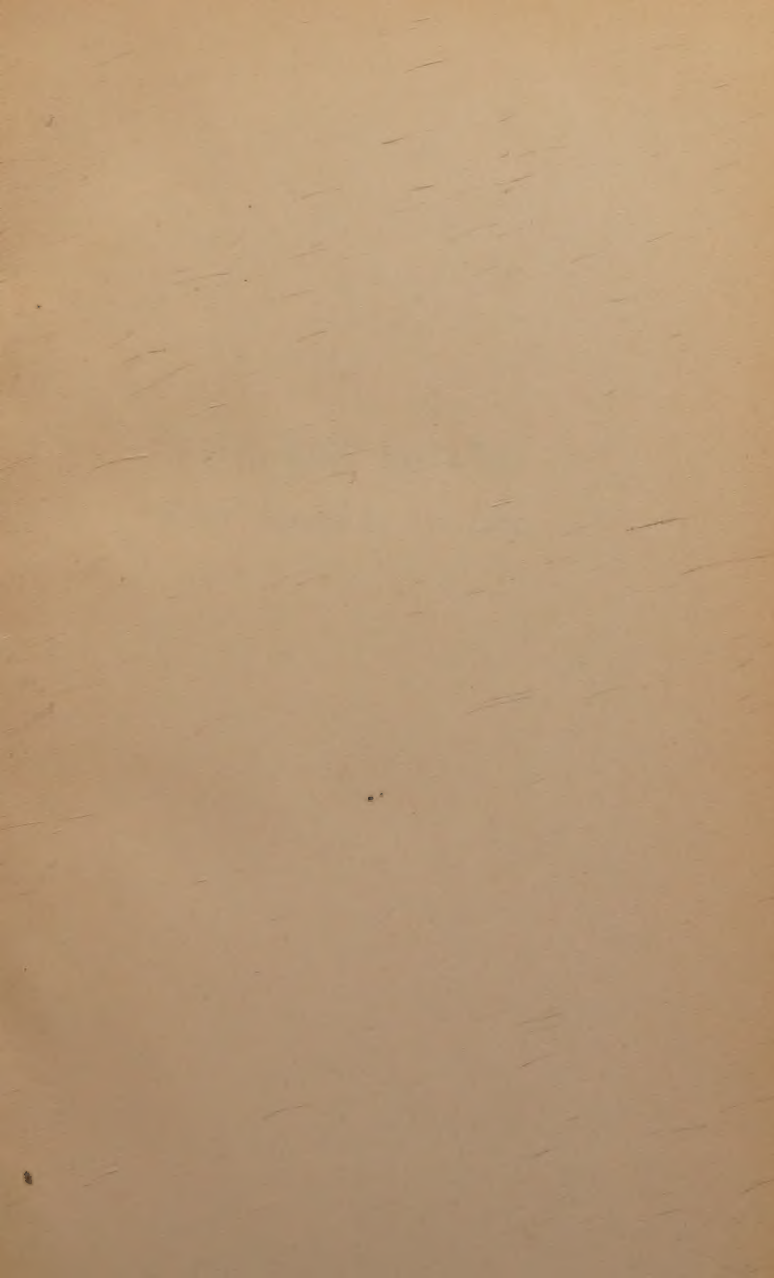
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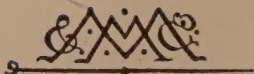


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THE BIG HOUSE

Four Scenes in Its Life



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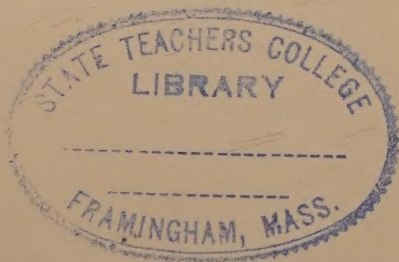
THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

THE BIG HOUSE

FOUR SCENES IN ITS LIFE

by

LENNOX ROBINSON



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1928

Framingham State College
Framingham, Massachusetts

For permission to perform this play and for information as to the fees payable, application must be made to Messrs. Curtis Brown, 6 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C. Fees on a royalty basis are allowed to amateur societies.

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PR

6035

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TO
RUTHERFORD MAYNE
OF THE ULSTER PLAYERS
this play of County Cork

CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance.

ATKINS.

REV. HENRY BROWN.

CAPTAIN MONTGOMERY DESPARD.

KATE ALCOCK.

VANDALEUR O'NEILL.

MRS. ALCOCK.

ANNIE DALY.

THREE YOUNG MEN.

SCENE I. The drawing-room at Ballydonal House.
A November morning, 1918.

SCENE II. The dining-room at Ballydonal House.
A June evening, 1921.

SCENE III. The same. A February night, 1923.

SCENE IV. A corner of the garden early the next
morning.



BALLYDONAL HOUSE

SCENE I

SCENE: *The large drawing-room at Ballydonal House. The room must give the impression of size, on a small stage one of its sides must not be seen but should be "masked" by a large Chinese screen. At the back are two large windows, they can be either Georgian type or mock-Gothic, there are heavy curtains on them. On the side of the room which is seen is a door up stage and, lower down, a fireplace. A profusion of furniture, some good, some bad, profusion of small unimportant pictures, photographs, china on the walls; the effect of all being a comfortable room containing the vestigia of generations, the mid-Victorian vestigia prevailing. There is a bright fire and bright sunshine outside the windows. It is about ten-thirty on a November morning 1918. The room is empty. A door on the unseen side of the room opens and the voice of ATKINS, the butler, is heard.*

ATKINS. Mr. Brown to see you, sir.

(MR. BROWN appears round the screen, a middle-aged, bearded clergyman.)

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

BROWN (*looking round the room*). Atkins! Atkins!

ATKINS (*coming back but still unseen*). Did you call, sir?

BROWN. Mr. Alcock isn't here.

ATKINS (*coming into sight round the screen and looking round the room. He is a small stout man of sixty-five, his gait is a little rolling, his voice a little thick, he is obviously a little drunk.*) I beg your pardon, your reverence, he was here a minute ago. (*He crosses to the door above the fireplace, opens it and looks into the next room. He shuts it again.*) There's no one in the small drawing-room but Captain Despard. I'll send looking for him.

BROWN. Thank you.

ATKINS. He'll likely have walked out to the yard to see do they understand about the bell.

BROWN. What bell?

ATKINS. The big bell, Father—your reverence, I mean—the yard bell. It's to be rung at eleven o'clock and it's not been rung these twenty years.

BROWN. I see. Part of the celebrations?

ATKINS. But indeed he needn't be bothering. I have Paddy O'Reilly tutored in the bell. He's to be there since ten o'clock, the rope in his hand, the cook's alarm clock hanging on the wall in front of his face and on the stroke of eleven he's to start bell-ringing, ring for a quarter of an hour and then walk into the kitchen

for the bottle of stout the master's after ordering for him.

BROWN. I see. Well, it's a great day.

ATKINS. It is, Father.

BROWN. You'll be expecting your grandson home now. Is he still in Salonika?

ATKINS. He is. When he couldn't get through them Dardanelles he gev up and he's sitting in Salonika ever since.

BROWN. He's been luckier than some. . . . Will you try and find Mr. Alcock? I can't wait long, I have a lot to do this morning.

ATKINS. I will, your reverence. There's the papers—this morning's *Constitution* and Saturday's *Irish Times*. We don't get it till the morning now since the second post was cut off, bad luck to it. But I suppose it's the same way at the Rectory.

BROWN. It is indeed.

ATKINS. Ah well, please God now the Germans are bet we'll have posts and sugar and everything back the way it used to be long ago. Will I bring you a glass of sherry while you're waiting?

BROWN. No, thank you.

ATKINS. You'll excuse me for asking, Father—your reverence, I mean—I forgot you were so mad for the temperance. I'll have the master for you now as fast as I can get him. (*He ambles out.* MR. BROWN *opens the Irish Times and glances at it. From the door above*

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

the fire enters CAPTAIN DESPARD, *twenty-five years old, in uniform, he limps a little. He stops on seeing* BROWN.)

BROWN (*going to him, holding out his hand*). Howd'ye do? You are Captain Despard, I'm sure.

DESPARD. Oh—ah—yes.

BROWN. My name is Brown, I'm the parson here. St. Leger—Mr. Alcock—told me you were coming here.

DESPARD. Oh—yes.

BROWN. You've been having a nasty time with your foot, haven't you? Is it better?

DESPARD. Nearly all right. I hope I'll be able to go back in another week or ten days.

BROWN. But fortunately there'll be nothing to go back to.

DESPARD. Nothing?

BROWN. No war. Only half an hour more of it, thank goodness.

DESPARD. I doubt if it's as over as people think it is.

BROWN. But President Wilson's terms——

DESPARD. Those damned Yankees—beg pardon—but this Armistice business is a bad mistake, we should have marched through to Berlin.

BROWN. Hm! But if we get all we want without losing another man or killing another man——

DESPARD. Oh, losing! Killing! It's not a picnic.

BROWN. No, indeed, it isn't. . . . You were very good to poor Reginald. It made a great difference to Mrs. Alcock to know there was a friend with him when he died.

DESPARD. There wasn't much I could do.

BROWN. Still, it made a difference. Have you ever come across her other boy, Ulick?

DESPARD. Only once. A rather quiet dull sort of chap, isn't he? Not like poor old Reg.

BROWN. No, he's very different from Reginald. . . . I suppose you have no idea where Mr. Alcock is?

DESPARD. I haven't seen him since breakfast.

BROWN. Atkins is supposed to be looking for him, but Atkins is a little—well, he started to celebrate early.

DESPARD. Atkins? Oh, that's the butler. Why, he started to celebrate last night. You should have seen him handing round the soup. It was a marvel, but not a drop spilled.

BROWN. Poor Atkins. It's his one failing.

DESPARD. Typically Irish old fellow, isn't he?

BROWN. I hope not.

DESPARD. Oh, but he's a delightful old chap. And the rest of it doesn't seem to be so awfully Irish.

BROWN. The rest of it?

DESPARD. Well, the house itself, the way it's run, and—and everything.

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

BROWN. Do they read *Castle Rackrent* in the trenches?

DESPARD (*staring*). I don't think so, never heard of it. What do you mean?

BROWN. Nothing. I withdraw my insinuation. I started by thinking how blunderingly English your conclusions were, I beg your pardon. Second thoughts make me give you credit for exceedingly sharp penetration.

DESPARD. O, thank you.

BROWN. I'm sure you're thinking that we haven't known each other long enough for me to say that sort of thing to you. But here in the country fresh acquaintances are so rare that I've got into the impolite habit of taking short cuts. You must forgive me.

DESPARD. Oh, rot. There's nothing to forgive. I suppose I was a bit taken aback by your talking of my penetration. What the dickens have I penetrated?

BROWN. Mr. Alcock told me you have never been in Ireland before. You've been in this house for a day and two nights and in that short time you've put your finger on the great fact that it is not typical. It isn't. It's a protest against the type.

DESPARD. The type being?

BROWN. Not quite what you think it is. Not always slovenly and ramshackle. The difference doesn't lie in the obvious things you've seen, it's not that this room is clean and decent

and comfortable. Irish country houses frequently are that, it's not that your dinner was eatable and your bath hot——

DESPARD. Oh well, Irish hospitality—it's traditional, you know.

BROWN. But is St. Leger traditional, is Kate—Miss Alcock?

DESPARD. She's a jolly fine girl.

BROWN. You won't realise how fine until you see the others!

DESPARD. What others? She's the only daughter.

BROWN. I mean the types. Without an idea. With no culture. Ignorant. Don't know whether the portraits that hang in their dining-rooms are eighteenth-century masterpieces or photogravures, don't know if the silver they use every day is old Irish or modern Brummagem. Don't know the history of their own family, don't know Irish history. Have nothing but a few religious prejudices and very good health. Can't even grow decent flowers.

DESPARD. Well, they're great sportswomen, Irish sportswomen are traditional you know.

BROWN. That's the least Irish thing about them, your real Irishwoman despises sport, she thinks its only use is keeping the men out of mischief. And the Irish gentleman! Ignorant. Asleep. Look at their libraries. A splendid collection of eighteenth-century classics, twenty volumes of sermons of the early nineteenth

century—after that nothing. They're divorced from all reality.

DESPARD. Oh, I say!

BROWN. Absurd of me to blaze out like this, isn't it? But I know what I'm talking about. My name's as common as dirt, but I'm from County Wexford and County Wexford Browns fancy themselves. They came over with your people once upon a time. I'm attacking my own class. And I'm extraordinarily interested in watching this house and the fight it's making.

DESPARD. Fight? What the dickens is it fighting for?

BROWN. Its life.

(KATE ALCOCK comes in, her arms are full of Michaelmas daisies.)

BROWN. Ah Kate! Good-morning.

KATE. Mr. Brown! I haven't a finger. Aren't they lovely? They're lasting so long this year. What a morning. Such sunshine. You've made each other's acquaintance?

BROWN. Yes.

KATE. You've heard the great news of course? Aunt Kat wired to Father from London first thing this morning, we knew at breakfast time.

BROWN. Miss Doyle at the Post Office made no bones of sharing the news, the whole village knew it before you did and she sent a messenger to the Rectory on a bicycle.

KATE. Well, I don't blame her. Can you

believe that the horrible thing will be killed dead at eleven o'clock, in less than half an hour?

BROWN. Captain Despard doesn't believe it will be killed.

KATE. Oh, soldiers are such optimists. Where's the boss?

BROWN. He's being looked for.

KATE. You're coming to dinner to-night, I hope. With this news it's going to be a celebration.

BROWN. That's what I called in to say. Alice's cold is almost gone, and she'll be delighted to come, for, as you say, it will be an occasion.

KATE. It's only ourselves, you know, not a dinner-party.

BROWN. Gracious, we didn't expect a dinner-party. When were you at a dinner-party last, Kate? Here, in County Cork, I mean?

KATE. Mother and I were counting up the other day. Not since the first winter of the war when those people took Knock for the shooting. They were awful bounders, but they did manage to gather fifteen people for a dinner-party. . . . My goodness, Monty, you're going to have a dull time of it here. . . . I told the boss it was cruel to invite you.

DESPARD. You forget. I invited myself.

KATE. Well, on your own head be it. We tried having Colonials here for their leave, men you know, who had no relations or friends to go

to. The South Africans didn't mind much, but the Australians always, after one day, sent themselves telegrams recalling themselves to the front. . . . I must get some more vases. Here's the boss.

(MR. ALCOCK *comes in*, KATE *goes out*.)

ALCOCK. Henry!

BROWN. Good - morning, St. Leger. I couldn't let you know yesterday whether Alice would be well enough to come over to-night. I've come now to tell you that she can.

ALCOCK. Good. You've heard the news?

BROWN. Yes.

ALCOCK. In our quiet way we're going to let things rip to-night, I depend on Captain Despard to make things lively.

DESPARD. Don't expect too much from me.

ALCOCK. Oh, I've another string to my bow. (To BROWN) I've just been down to that place you don't approve of—the wine-cellar.

BROWN. Atkins has been looking for you.

ALCOCK. I didn't see him, and I should have thought his feet would have turned instinctively in that direction. If anyone knows the way to the cellar he does. I haven't been there for six months or more but, thanks to Atkins, it's like Mother Hubbard's cupboard. You know all we take—a little claret at dinner, my small whisky before I go to bed—but Atkins! My dear Despard, that old chap has an unerring palate. I bought a couple of dozen of cheap Burgundy,

not bad at all, but cheap, I thought I'd buy him off with them. He tried one bottle but then concentrated on my best Pommard, and there's only one bottle of brandy left. He seems to have a conscience about champagne, it is sacred in his sight and you shall have plenty of it to-night.

BROWN. You can leave my name out of it.

ALCOCK. Hang it all, the night of the Armistice you must make an exception. Mrs. Brown is T.T., but I'm sure she'll drink her glass to-night like a good 'un.

BROWN. I wouldn't put it past her. Women seem to be able to square their consciences in a way we can't.

ALCOCK. By the way, I'm glad I've seen you beforehand. To-night *is* an occasion and we'll drink a toast—the King and Victory. But not a word. No speeches or anything like that. Mary's feeling it a bit, of course. I know Reg is very much in her mind and if we once started to say things anything might happen.

BROWN. You needn't be afraid, I won't want to say anything, I couldn't trust myself. I'll be thinking of Dick.

ALCOCK. Of course. (*To* DESPARD) He lost his only boy at Gallipoli. Such a splendid chap.

DESPARD. Rotten luck.

BROWN. When did you hear from Ulick?

ALCOCK. Yesterday. Fit as a fiddle. Only a few lines, things had been pretty strenuous of course.

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

BROWN. I wonder how soon you can expect him back.

ALCOCK. His mother has set her heart on having him for Christmas.

ATKINS (*unseen*). Mr. O'Neill.

(*A gawky common-looking young man comes in.*)

ALCOCK. Hallo, Vandaleur.

VANDALEUR (*in a very marked brogue*). Good-morning, Alcock. Good-morning, Mr. Brown.

ALCOCK. Mr. O'Neill, Captain Despard. (*They shake hands.*)

DESPARD. How d'ye do?

VANDALEUR. I hope ye're well. (*To ALCOCK*) I was riding in this direction and me mother asked me to leave in a note, she and the gerr'ls want Mrs. Alcock and Kate to go over to tea next week. Here it is. 'Tis a bit crushed I'm afraid.

ALCOCK (*ringing the bell*). I'll get it sent to Mary. Will you wait for the answer? Sit down.

VANDALEUR (*sitting*). Thank ye. . . . Me fawther's sick.

ALCOCK. I'm sorry to hear that. Is he seriously ill?

VANDALEUR. I don't know. . . . I sold the black mare.

ALCOCK. Oh, did you get a good price?

VANDALEUR. Rotten.

BROWN. I'll go over and see your father this afternoon.

VANDALEUR. Ye needn't then.

BROWN. I can quite easily go, and if he's ill——

VANDALEUR. Sure he went to Cork by the morning train.

BROWN. Oh! Will he be back to-night?

VANDALEUR. Well, he was going to the doctor, and it would depind on what he said whether he'd end up the day in the hospital or in the County Club, but I think meself he'll be for the club.

BROWN. Oh! (*Enter ATKINS.*)

ALCOCK. Take this to the mistress please, and tell her that Mr. O'Neill is waiting for the answer.

ATKINS. Yes, sir (*he takes the note and goes*).

ALCOCK. Well, this is a great day, Vandaleur.

VANDALEUR. Indeed, 'tis wonderful weather for this time of year.

ALCOCK. I wasn't thinking of the weather.

VANDALEUR. There was a great turn-out for Dicky Smith's funeral a-Choosday, why weren't you there?

ALCOCK. I meant the war—the Armistice.

VANDALEUR. Oh, to be sure. Is it to be to-day or to-morrow?

ALCOCK. Within an hour.

VANDALEUR. Fancy that now. I suppose they'll fire off a big gun like or ring a bell.

DESPARD. Were you fighting?

VANDALEUR. I was not. (*To ALCOCK*) I met

Michael Dempsey on the avenue and he was telling me that you have some sheep sick and that one's after dying on you.

ALCOCK. Yes, Kate's in a great stew about it. But I've written to the vet. and I heard from him this morning. He's going to wire this morning and let me know if he can come to-day or to-morrow.

VANDALEUR. Is it the fella from Knock you mean?

ALCOCK. Yes.

VANDALEUR. He's a bloody bad vet. He lost me a mare and a foal last year. I'd rather have the district nurse than that fella. When they told me at home 'tother day that a cow was sick "Send for Mrs. Maguire," says I, "Send for Mrs. Maguire." That's all I'd say. Wasn't I right, Captain? (DESPARD *merely looks contemptuous.*)

BROWN. Well, I hope the cow survived.

VANDALEUR. Of course she did, she's lepping round giving gallons of milk. 'Tis all a cod, inspectors and departments and tillage. What the divil do the lads that make the regulations know about tillage? They wouldn't know the difference between wheat and oats.

ALCOCK. Well, we don't want to starve.

VANDALEUR. There's plenty to ate in this part of the country.

ALCOCK. But in the towns, in England——

VANDALEUR. Ah, let them go to the divil.

THE BIG HOUSE

(MRS. ALCOCK and KATE come in.)

MRS. ALCOCK. Good-morning, Van. Will you wait a minute while I write a note to your mother? I won't be long.

VANDALEUR. Sure there's no hurry. Good-morning, Kate.

KATE. Good-morning, Van. Sit down, don't mind me, I'm only doing these flowers.

VANDALEUR (*sitting*). Flossie and Maggie and Helana and Gertie sent you their love.

KATE. Please give them my love.

VANDALEUR (*after a pause*). Sissy sent you her love too.

KATE. Give my love to Sissy.

ALCOCK (*to DESPARD*). Do you feel up to a stroll?

DESPARD. I'm afraid not. I've got to rest my foot as much as possible.

VANDALEUR. Are you after hurting your foot?

DESPARD. Yes.

ALCOCK. He got a nasty knock in France.

VANDALEUR. France?

DESPARD. There happens to be a war on there.

VANDALEUR. Sure I know. . . . Jerry Mangan's not the better of the fall he got, yet.

KATE. Oh, did he get a fall? I hadn't heard.

VANDALEUR. Lepping a small bit of a fence on that old red mare of his. Sure he's the rottenest rider in the country.

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

ALCOCK. I wish I had a horse to offer you, Despard, the only beast in the stables is the old carriage mare.

KATE. I'm sure the Goods or the O'Sullivans would lend him a horse.

VANDALEUR. Sure me fawther would lend him one. What about Prince Chawming?

DESPARD (*shortly*). No, thank you.

VANDALEUR. He's quiet but a good goer and a very handy lepper. . . . You know him, Kate?

KATE. Yes. . . . Have you any flowers left, Van?

VANDALEUR. I don't know. 'Tis the gerr'ls looks after the flowers.

MRS. ALCOCK (*getting up*). There, Van. Now don't forget it in your pocket.

VANDALEUR. I won't, Mrs. Alcock. Me mother sent you her love.

MRS. ALCOCK. Thank you.

VANDALEUR. And so did the gerr'ls. At least I didn't see Helana when I was leaving, but I'm sure she would have if I had seen her.

MRS. ALCOCK. Give them all my love and say I'm looking forward to seeing them next week. How's your father?

VANDALEUR. Sick.

BROWN. Are you in a great hurry, Van, or will you walk down the avenue with me?

VANDALEUR. Sure I'm in no hurry.

BROWN. Well, unfortunately, I am, so if you don't mind we'll be off now. I want to talk to you about the graveyard at Kilbeg. Good-bye, Mrs. Alcock, till this evening.

MRS. ALCOCK. Seven-thirty. I'm so glad Alice is better, make her wrap up well.

ALCOCK. I'm sending the brougham for you at seven o'clock. Now don't start to protest, it's all been arranged.

BROWN. It's very kind of you. The little walk really wouldn't have done her any harm.
. . . *Au revoir.*

(BROWN goes to the door, while VANDALEUR awkwardly and formally shakes hands with everyone. He finishes with DESPARD.)

VANDALEUR. You're sure you won't have Prince Chawming?

DESPARD. Certain. . . . Thanks.

BROWN. Come on, Vandaleur. (*They go out.*)

KATE. Go on, Monty, say it. Don't spare our feelings. "What a lout!" Or was it something worse, something unprintable?

DESPARD. In present company "lout" will have to do. Who is he? A farmer's son?

KATE (*laughing*). Farmer's son! Vandaleur O'Neill!

ALCOCK. If family counts for anything he gets full marks. A quarter of him is Irish—the best old Irish, the other three-quarters are successive English invasions. Compared to

him we're second-rate interlopers. His father is first cousin and heir to Lord Rathconnell, but the father is drinking himself to death, he won't last a twelvemonth longer. Van doesn't drink, Van will be the next lord.

DESPARD. That clodhopper?

MRS. ALCOCK. Poor boy, it's not his fault, and he's really a good boy.

ALCOCK. No, it's not his fault, it's his wicked old father and his foolish mother. He was sent to a preparatory school in England; at the end of the first term he refused to go back, and his father and mother gave in. That's all the education he ever had. He can just sign his name, I suppose he can read. He's lived at home ever since with his father and mother and his five sisters.

KATE. Flossie and Sissy and Maggie and Gertie and "Helana"! And we've got to have tea with them all next week. Why did you say we'd go, mother?

MRS. ALCOCK. My dear, what could I do? Mrs. O'Neill asked me for *any* day next week. I couldn't say I was engaged for the whole week, that's simply unbelievable in Ballydonal.

KATE. I don't mind Van, I like poor Van. It's the "gerr'ls", as he calls them. What day did you say you'd go?

MRS. ALCOCK. Wednesday.

KATE. Thank God.

MRS. ALCOCK. Why?

KATE. I've two committees that afternoon.

MRS. ALCOCK. I don't believe it.

KATE. It's quite true. Poultry Society and Library.

MRS. ALCOCK. You and your committees!

KATE. They're better than tea with the O'Neills.

(ATKINS *appears.*)

ATKINS. There's a lad of the O'Flynn's wishful to speak to your ladyship.

MRS. ALCOCK. Who?

ATKINS. One of the O'Flynn's from the cross.

MRS. ALCOCK. Are you sure he doesn't want the master?

ATKINS. He asked specially for your ladyship.

MRS. ALCOCK. All right, I'll come. (ATKINS *goes.*) Atkins is drunk, St. Leger. He always ladyships me when he's drunk.

ALCOCK. Yes, my dear.

MRS. ALCOCK. Can't you do something? Can't you speak to him?

ALCOCK. Not much use while he's drunk. And I suppose there is some excuse this morning.

MRS. ALCOCK. If there wasn't you'd invent one. You're too easy-going.

ALCOCK. He's been here for more than forty years.

MRS. ALCOCK. Will you do what I've been

asking you to do for the last twenty years? Will you get him to give you his key of the cellar?

ALCOCK. My dear, that would hurt his feelings.

MRS. ALCOCK. What about *my* feelings? Captain Despard will go back to England talking about us being so Irish. And I'm not Irish, Captain Despard, thank God. I'm a Hampshire woman, a respectable Hampshire woman, in exile, with a drunken Irish butler, and now I've got to go and talk to a "lad of the O'Flynnns". Even after living here for twenty years I won't understand half of what he says. I suppose he wants a bottle of medicine for his old grandmother, or he wants to sell me a rabbit he's poached a hundred yards from our own front-door.

(Half vexed, half amused, she goes out.)

DESPARD. Mrs. Alcock's quite wrong, I'm enjoying myself immensely.

ALCOCK. Ah, but that's just what you mustn't do. You mustn't "enjoy" us as if we were a comic story or a play. My wife would like you to take us as seriously as you'd take any country-house in England. She tries—she's tried for twenty-five years—to keep us serious, but always at our most proper moments Atkins or a lad of the O'Flynnns keeps breaking in. You remember Doctor Johnson's friend?

DESPARD *(not remembering)*. Yes, oh yes.

ALCOCK. There's a great deal to be said for marrying out of your race. I like every now and then seeing Ballydonal through her foreign, hostile eyes. A touch of Hampshire does us no harm, keeps us from becoming like the O'Neills.

KATE. They married the foreigner, as you said yourself, but it didn't save them.

ALCOCK. True, it doesn't always work.

DESPARD. It's all part of what the padre was saying—that you're not the type.

ALCOCK. Oh, Brown talks a lot of nonsense. I keep telling him that we *are* the type, people like the O'Neills are the dreadful variants.

DESPARD. Is the padre himself up to type?

ALCOCK. He's a gentleman by birth and education—no, I'm afraid he's no longer the typical Irish parson. I believe you can be ordained now without having been to college—to what you and I would call a college. And the priests are as bad. Old Canon Maguire, who was here for forty years, was a travelled, cultivated gentleman, it was a pleasure and an honour to have him to dinner, but he's dead and gone and the new parish priest—impossible—a barbarian.

KATE. I'm sure priests are like soldiers. Didn't Bernard Shaw say that there are only two kinds of soldiers—young soldiers and old soldiers? There are only three kinds of priests, young, old and middle-aged. The old are, as

father says, charmers, the middle-aged are rather dreadful generally, but I adore the curates, especially the Republican ones, they're such splendid workers.

DESPARD. Kate!

ALCOCK. Yes, she's hand-in-glove with them. The other day I came round a corner of the road, between here and the village, and I found a curate sitting on a pile of stones giving my daughter a lesson in Irish while she mended a puncture in his bicycle.

KATE. Well, he had cut his hand; I didn't want him to get the cut full of dirt. And he was a very old friend, a great pet, he got into trouble with the bishop in 1916.

DESPARD. About what?

ALCOCK (*drily*). Not theology!

KATE (*airily*). Drilling and guns and a plan to blow up a military barracks.

DESPARD. Oh no! Good God!

KATE. A fact.

DESPARD. Are the Protestant curates as bad as that?

KATE. Worse. They play tennis.

(MRS. ALCOCK *comes in*.)

MRS. ALCOCK. You must come, St. Leger, the boy is trying to get at you through me. Something about a brother of his who's been arrested. One of those Sinn Feiners, I think. He wants you to write "a bit of a note" to somewhere or someone, he's not sure to whom.

ALCOCK. Oh, these notes! Do you want a character, Despard, for some brother or cousin of yours whom I have never seen? I shall be delighted to give you one, I am a past master in the art of describing and praising the unknown. I'll come, Mary.

KATE (*to him as he goes out*). Any wire from the vet?

ALCOCK. No, nothing so far.

(MR. and MRS. ALCOCK *go out*.)

KATE. Poor father!

DESPARD. Why poor?

KATE. Oh, I don't know. . . . Yes, I do. It's not his *métier*, all this.

DESPARD. This?

KATE. Notes to magistrates, sick sheep and general rural uplift. His place is in the music-room, at his piano.

DESPARD. Does he play the piano?

KATE. Does he play——? Why, it's what he does do, much too well to be quite respectable in an Irish country gentleman. He was never intended for Ballydonal, he was in the Foreign Office, but his elder brother broke his neck hunting, and so he had to come back here.

DESPARD. Yes, it's no sort of a life for him or for you.

KATE. Oh, I'm not like father, I love it. . . . There's something I want you to tell me—how soon do you think we may expect Ulick home, not on leave, for good and all I mean? Suppos-

ing this armistice means peace, how soon is he likely to be able to get clear of the army?

DESPARD. Awfully hard to say. Three or four months perhaps, if he pushes hard.

KATE. Oh, he'll push like the dickens . . . December, January, February . . . he might be home in March.

DESPARD. Of course he might get some leave before then. Your mother told me he's due leave.

KATE. Yes, he hates fighting so much that he has a sort of conscience about pressing for leave and allows himself to be passed over. But if the war is over he'll have no conscience, he'll work heaven and earth to get out of the army.

DESPARD. To come and live here?

KATE. Yes. . . . And you go back to the law, I suppose?

DESPARD. Not if I can help it. I'll move heaven and earth to stay in the army.

KATE. You like it so much, Monty?

DESPARD. It's taught me what living is.

KATE. It seems to me like four years stolen out of life.

DESPARD. Yes, I know, it's been hard on girls, not much fun and all the men away. . . . Do you remember, Kate, what I said to you that night in London, the night before I went back to France?

KATE. I'm sure we all said a lot of silly things.

DESPARD. I said a lot of things to you, but I

didn't say one thing. . . . I don't believe it's right for a chap to get engaged—married perhaps—when there's a war on. It's not fair to the girl. That's why I didn't ask you to marry me.

KATE. Oh, there were lots of other reasons. Feminine ones. That pretty Scotch girl, for instance.

DESPARD. Lulu Mackenzie? Nonsense. I liked you better than all the others rolled together.

KATE. That's only because I was Reggie's sister, your best friend's sister.

DESPARD. No, really. Do you remember Billie Dale? Vulgar little chap, but he had a knack of hitting the nail on the head. Well, *he* said to me that night, "Monty, the little Irish girl has all the others beaten to a frazzle".

KATE. That dreadful Mr. Dale!

DESPARD. As dreadful as you like, but it's God's truth.

KATE. To begin with, I'm not particularly little, I haven't grey eyes and long dark lashes, I don't speak with a fascinating brogue——

DESPARD. Your voice——

KATE. Stop! I remember you telling me that your favourite play was *Peg o' my Heart*. Well, I'm none of your Pegs. I don't go about with an Irish terrier under my arm, I don't much like dogs, I've no April moods, I don't go from tears to laughter in a

moment, I don't believe I've cried once in ten years.

DESPARD. You're charming!

KATE. Much you know what I'm like! You've only known me in London spending a giddy fortnight there, on a holiday and consequently exactly the opposite of what I really am. I'm quite different here. Before you were out of your bath this morning I had fed my hens, when I've finished these flowers I'm going to garden till lunch—not a lady-like snipping off of dead flowers, really hard digging with a spade, forking dung probably. After lunch I go to the creamery for a committee meeting. I ride to the committee. I don't ride there on an unbroken pony, bare-backed, with my hair flying, I ride on a bicycle, a rather old and dirty bicycle, and I wear a rather old and dirty tweed coat and skirt. After the meeting I go to a poultry lecture, after the lecture to an Irish class. I'll have to leave the class early because you're here, and dinner to-night is an affair. If you weren't here I wouldn't be home in time for dinner, and I'd have tea and bread and jam when I came back. That's the real me, the me I like to be.

DESPARD. Yes, because you've never had the chance to be anything else.

KATE. I think I could have been other things.

DESPARD. You can be other things now.

KATE. Monty, are you asking me to marry you?

DESPARD. Of course.

KATE. I wish you wouldn't.

DESPARD. I can't help myself.

KATE. O yes, you can. It's all sentimentalism, peg of my heartiness.

DESPARD. You liked me in London. Don't you like me here?

KATE. It's different here, you're not part of my life here, you're part of the London holiday—a very nice part, Monty.

DESPARD. Make London your life, have Ballydonal for holiday.

KATE. Ah, there's Ulick.

DESPARD. What the devil—beg pardon—what has your brother got to do with it?

KATE. Everything.

DESPARD. Everything?

KATE. He's like me; we think Ballydonal *is* life, our life. Of course, as long as Reggie was alive he was the eldest and he'd inherit, but he hated the country, he went straight from school into the army; he'd never want to live here. We planned that Ulick should rent the place from him or live here as sort of manager-agent. Ulick's all father isn't, a born farmer, a born public man, but he didn't depend merely on his instincts; he spent five years learning the newest and best ways of farming, and I've learnt lots of things you'd think silly and dull about

poultry and milk and vegetables and bees, we were just ready to start here together—Ballydonal Limited—and then this horrible war came and upset everything, and I've been carrying on as best I could and Ulick's been drilling and marching and breaking his heart to be back, but now the war's over and Reggie's dead and——

DESPARD. Well?

KATE. I don't see why I shouldn't say it, even to his best friend. I'm glad Reggie's dead, glad he died like that, honourably, with letters after his name and mentioned in despatches and all that sort of thing. You knew him well, better than I did probably, and you knew he was handsome and popular, and that he gambled too much and drank too much and got himself mixed up in at least one very shady affair——

DESPARD. Reg was a bit reckless, but there was no harm in him. Just Irish high spirits.

KATE. Just Irish dissipation. Just what has tumbled the big houses into ruins or into the hands of the big graziers or into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. Vandaleur O'Neills! Not poor Van himself, but the generations of your Irish high spirits that have gone to the making of Van. Reggie wouldn't have cared if he had dragged Ballydonal down. But Ulick and I do care—tremendously. We're going to hold our heads above water, hold Ballydonal above water, proudly and decently.

DESPARD. Milk and hens and turnips! It seems a poor ambition.

KATE. Oh, it's not milk for milk's sake exactly. Everything's mixed up in it, the country, the people, the whole thing.

DESPARD. Good Lord, you're not a Nationalist, are you?

KATE. I thought fervent Nationalism was part of the make-up of your little grey-eyed Irish girl. . . . But no, I don't think I'm a Nationalist, I don't bother about politics, they crop up sometimes at committee meetings and are a great nuisance, and that's all I know about them.

DESPARD. But you learn Irish.

KATE. Yes. You learnt Latin.

DESPARD. I had to. It was part of the make-up of my career.

KATE. Irish is part of my make-up. I don't like it much; I don't suppose you liked Latin much. Ulick's better at it than I am; he really likes it, he even has managed to keep it up in spite of the war; he'll fit perfectly into the Ballydonal picture.

DESPARD. Hasn't it occurred to you that Ulick may marry? Where would you come in then?

KATE. I wouldn't come in, I'd go out.

DESPARD. So you'd much better marry me. I believe we'd make a good thing of marriage. I'd understand you. After all, my grandmother was Irish—from Ulster. .

KATE. Ulster!

DESPARD. That's where I get my sense of humour from.

KATE. I see. . . . These Irish grandmothers!

DESPARD. Think it over, give me a chance. I'm here for a week anyway.

KATE. If I answered you now, Monty, I'd say "no". If you want me to think it over you must wait until I've seen Ulick.

DESPARD. I don't see the necessity of talking it over with him.

KATE. Oh, maybe I won't talk it over with him, but I just want to see him, see him here, and—and—oh, I do like you very much, Monty, but to live and work here with Ulick——!

DESPARD. Ten to one after France and the army this place will seem so desperately slow that he'll chuck it after a year.

KATE. If you only knew him! . . . Why, he comes here sometimes—I don't mean on leave—that's the only really Irish bit of me, I see him sometimes when he's not here at all.

DESPARD. What? Do you mean a ghost? Is this place haunted?

KATE. Sometimes. By Ulick. The night he enlisted he came, he stood on the gravel outside the hall-door, he looked so sad, so very sad. And twice I've seen him in the library standing at the bookcase where all the farming books are. And then only three nights ago.

DESPARD. Where?

KATE. I was coming back from the village, it was dusk, I had pushed my bicycle through the gate between the park and the grass-garden. I was closing the gate when I saw him coming up the drive towards me. He was walking very fast and he was looking very happy. He passed me, and I said "Ulick", I couldn't help it, he seemed so real. By that time he was on the hall-door steps, he turned round, gave me a smile and was gone.

DESPARD. By Jove!

KATE. That was just when the armistice had begun to seem inevitable. He was dreaming it all over you see, he was dreaming he was home. And you think he'd chuck it! How he's managed all this time to keep himself from deserting——!

DESPARD. He must be a rum chap. Well, everyone to their taste. But if you're right and he does stick here he'll be certain to marry. It will be part of his programme; he'll marry one of O'Neill's sisters.

KATE. Monty, your Irish grandmother has given you a revolting imagination.

(MR. ALCOCK *comes back, the others separate a little self-consciously.*)

DESPARD. It's such a ripping morning, I think, foot or no foot, I must go out for a bit. I'll go and put on a pair of stronger shoes. May I come and watch you gardening, Kate?

KATE. Certainly. (*He goes.*)

KATE. Well, what did young O'Flynn want?

ALCOCK. Oh, just a note to the R.M. at Carrig. His brother has got himself into a bad mess, I'm afraid. He was suspected of being mixed up in that raid for arms at Carrigmore, and now three shot-guns were found in the mattress of his bed.

KATE. What an uncomfortable place to put them. Did you give his brother the note?

ALCOCK. Of course. . . . I like Despard.

KATE. Do you?

ALCOCK. Don't you?

KATE. Oh yes, quite.

ALCOCK. You saw a good deal of him in London last spring, didn't you?

KATE. Yes, he was staying with Aunt Kat for his leave, and then he got measles, and that kept him there longer so we saw a lot of each other.

ALCOCK. I know he was a great friend of Reggie's, but Reggie never told us much about him. Who are his people?

KATE. Oh, the usual respectable English people with public-school temperaments. They think they're very poor, we'd call them quite rich.

ALCOCK. He's been a barrister, hasn't he? He'll go back to it after the war, I suppose?

KATE. Darling, don't try and be diplomatic. Have him into the library and ask him his income and his intentions. They are both

entirely honourable. As you most obviously suspect—he wants to marry me.

ALCOCK. And you?

KATE. Am not at all sure that I want to marry him, and am not going to be rushed.

ALCOCK. I'd like you to marry, Kitty.

KATE. Thanks.

ALCOCK. That's the worst of living here. You meet no one you could, decently, marry.

KATE. I don't think I want to get married at all. I'm quite happy here, especially now Ulick's coming home.

ALCOCK. Ulick must marry, of course. You wouldn't be so happy then.

KATE. That's what Captain Despard threatened me with.

ALCOCK. I think if you really like Despard you'd be wise to take the chance of getting out of all this. Ballydonal's no life for an unmarried woman.

KATE. It's my life. I don't like marrying out of my life, out of my class—I don't mean that in a snobbish way, I'm sure the Despards are as good as we are—but they're different, they're English.

ALCOCK. You're half English yourself.

KATE. The English half of me seems swamped.

ALCOCK. How can you, if you stay here, marry into your class? Who is there to choose? Vandaleur?

KATE. No, not poor Van.

ALCOCK. There's not another house left within visiting distance except Carrigmore, and there are only two old women there. Get out of it, get away. You've done your duty by Ballydonal splendidly in Ulick's absence; now that he's coming back, quit.

KATE. Are you going to quit?

ALCOCK. Your mother would like to, but I think I'm too old to change. But, gracious, I'm going to quit in all kinds of other ways. My mind is full of letters of resignation.

KATE. From what?

ALCOCK. Everything. Every blessed committee and board I'm on. The Old Age Pensions, the Creamery, the Library, the District Council, the Hospital, the Select Vestry, the Diocesan Synod, the Agricultural Show, and all the other fifty committees. Ulick must take my place on them all. The moment he comes back I retire. I'm going then to play scales, nothing but scales, for a month.

KATE. Disgusting self-indulgence.

(ATKINS comes in.)

ATKINS (*presenting a telegram*). The boy is waiting in case there's an answer.

ALCOCK (*taking it*). Thank you. This will be from the vet. (*A loud bell is heard.*) By Jove, we were forgetting! (*He looks at his watch.*) Eleven o'clock! Thank God.

KATE (*raising her arms with a gesture of relief*).
Oh, at last, at last.

ATKINS. He's ringing it too slow, the young
devil. Wait till I talk to him. (*He hurries out.*)

KATE. We can begin to live again.

ALCOCK. Poor Reginald!

KATE. Yes, poor old Reg. (*They are silent
for a little.*)

ALCOCK. Imagine London and Paris, how
the flags must be flying and the bells ringing.

KATE. And imagine poor Berlin.

ALCOCK. I don't want to think about that.
I spent such happy years there long ago—and
Vienna too. Oh well, they must be glad it's
over. But they won't be junketing.

KATE. I'm glad we're here and that it's
quiet. I'm so slow, I'll only take it in by
degrees. I couldn't throw down my work now
and start ragging. It wouldn't mean anything
to me. I'll take a week to realise.

ALCOCK. The sunshine and your gay flowers
will help us to take it in.

KATE. Yes. Michael Dempsey says—oh,
the vet, when is he coming, I promised to let
Michael know the moment we heard.

ALCOCK. I forgot. (*He opens and reads the
telegram, KATE has turned away.*)

KATE. I searched all through the sheep-book
again last night, and I know a lot of things it's
not, but I'm blessed if I know what it *is*. Michael
persists in calling it a "blasht". Well, is he

coming to-day? (*She turns and looks at her father, he looks at her strangely.*) What is it? . . . My darling, has anything happened?

ALCOCK (*with difficulty*). Ulick.

KATE. Ulick? (*She snatches the telegram*)
"His Majesty deeply regrets . . . of wounds."
Ulick? But the war is over.

ALCOCK. The eighth . . . three days ago.

KATE. Dead? . . . Ulick? . . . (*She begins to laugh hysterically.*) Listen to the bell, listen to the bell!

ALCOCK. My dear!

KATE. Victory! Victory!

ALCOCK. It *is*. For King, for Empire.
That's what matters.

KATE. Damn King and Empire. They don't matter, not to us.

ALCOCK (*his arm round her*). Hush, my dear, hush.

KATE (*breaking from him*). I won't hush. Why should I? Ulick's life was here, here. All he loved, all he worked for.

ALCOCK. We must try and be proud——

KATE (*passionately*). Never. Never in this world. I'll never be proud of it, I'll never pretend that it was anything but stupid and hateful. You and your King and your Empire! Much good they ever did Ulick, or me, or you.

ALCOCK. Stop, Kate, stop——

KATE. Stop your damned bell then.

(MRS. ALCOCK *hurries in, she goes straight to her husband and throws her arms round his neck.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. Do you hear it? Peace! Victory!

ALCOCK. Yes, yes, dear. (*Over her shoulder to KATE*) Kate, please.

(*KATE goes out.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. Isn't it wonderful? But—so silly of me—I feel I want to cry. . . . It's Reggie, my poor dead Reggie.

ALCOCK. Of course, dear, of course.

MRS. ALCOCK. But I won't cry, I won't cry. I'll be proud of my dead, I'll think of my living. I'll think of Ulick.

ALCOCK. Yes . . . Ulick. . . .

MRS. ALCOCK. Won't Ulick laugh at us when he hears that we rang the poor old bell?

ALCOCK (*leading her to the sofa*). My dear . . . I have something to tell you.

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes, but listen to the bell, it's ringing faster now, Paddy is ringing it *con amore*; he must be thinking of his beloved "Masther Ulick".

ALCOCK. I want to tell you . . . (*he stops*).

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes?

ALCOCK. I have had a telegram from the War Office.

MRS. ALCOCK. About Ulick?

ALCOCK. Yes, about Ulick.

MRS. ALCOCK. He's coming back? When?

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE I

ALCOCK. No. He's never coming back.

MRS. ALCOCK. Never? What do you mean?
. . . What do you mean, St. Leger?

ALCOCK. My poor darling.

(She stares at him, tries to say something, can't. His arm is round her and as he draws her to him the curtain falls. The bell is ringing quite merrily by this time.)

SCENE II

The dining-room at Ballydonal. An evening in the latter part of June 1921. Dinner is over, everything has disappeared from the table except dessert—a dish of strawberries. MR. and MRS. ALCOCK are sitting at the table, he wears a dinner jacket.

MRS. ALCOCK. A few more strawberries, St. Leger?

ALCOCK. No, thank you.

MRS. ALCOCK. Just two or three—this big one. There are plenty left for Kate. (*She helps him to a few.*)

ALCOCK. Thanks. Take some yourself.

MRS. ALCOCK. I never remember having them so early as this, and so sweet.

ALCOCK. Of course the weather is exceptional.

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes. Brady says if we haven't rain soon these will be the last as well as the first. I wonder why weather is so difficult. It seems as if no weather was just the right weather. The roses are hardly worth the picking, they fade in a few hours.

ALCOCK. I love it. I love the heat. Do you

remember that June in Rome—'94 or '95, was it?—the heat and the roses?

MRS. ALCOCK. I remember. But even then the weather was wrong for the children, and I had to take them up to that horrible place in the hills.

ALCOCK. . . . How long ago it seems. . . . Like a different existence. . . .

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes. . . . It's nine years since we were abroad. Couldn't we manage to go this summer, even for a few weeks? There are such cheap trips again. I don't care how I go. I'll be a Polytechnic—whatever that means—or a Free Churcher, I'll stay at the scrubbiest *pensions*, I'll submit to being shown the Eiffel Tower from a char-a-banc—anything to get away.

ALCOCK. Isn't your sister going next month? Go with her.

MRS. ALCOCK. Not without you.

ALCOCK. I can't.

MRS. ALCOCK. What good does your staying here do?

ALCOCK. I'd be miserable away.

MRS. ALCOCK. You're miserable enough here in the middle of it, we're both miserable. Imagine the relief of being in a country whose politics mattered nothing to us.

ALCOCK. I don't believe I'd find it any relief. I'd always think I might have been able to do something if I'd stayed.

MRS. ALCOCK. You know you can't do anything. You can only wring your hands. It's much better to wash your hands of the whole thing.

ALCOCK. You're almost making an epigram.

MRS. ALCOCK. Am I? I know I'm talking common sense. I know that we're living in a community of criminal lunatics and that the sooner we get out of it the better.

ALCOCK. I'll wait till I'm put out.

MRS. ALCOCK. Burned out?

ALCOCK. Yes . . . Or starved out—that seems more likely.

MRS. ALCOCK (*with a sigh*). Sometimes I envy the O'Neills. Kate had a letter to-day from Sissy O'Neill. They are with some relations in London and having a wonderfully gay time. Everyone makes no end of them because they've been burned out of the ancestral home. If London only knew what the ancestral home was like!

ALCOCK. Such an ugly house.

MRS. ALCOCK. Such a filthy house. Mrs. O'Neill once told me that the drawing-room carpet had never been up in *her* time—and I believe her.

ALCOCK. I suppose the Irish refugees will soon become as *distingué* as the Russians. I understand that all the Russians are counts and princesses, all the Irish will be the descendants of kings. I can see the O'Neills having quite

a success. I can see chivalrous young Englishmen laying their hearts at the large feet of Flossie and Helana.

MRS. ALCOCK. I can't quite see that. Englishmen at least know a pretty girl when they see one; no one could call those red-faced O'Neills pretty.

ALCOCK. Being burned out will have paled their cheeks. Kate, unburned, wouldn't have a look-in beside them, so, not to spoil her chances of matrimony, I'll stay.

MRS. ALCOCK. Don't talk rubbish. What good can you do? Your being here didn't save poor Maggie Leahy this afternoon.

ALCOCK (*sighing*). No.

MRS. ALCOCK. All this murder has got to be put down ruthlessly. *You* can't be ruthless, so you'd better not be here while it's being put down.

ALCOCK. Ah, you admit it was murder.

MRS. ALCOCK. I admit nothing of the kind. Maggie's death was an accident—a most distressing one—but the ambush last night was murder pure and simple.

ALCOCK. I envy you, you have a wonderful power of discrimination.

MRS. ALCOCK. Right is right and wrong is wrong.

ALCOCK. Agreed.

MRS. ALCOCK. There are the eternal verities.

ALCOCK. No doubt there are, but what are they?

MRS. ALCOCK. You refuse to recognise them when you meet them, when they're as plain as the nose on your face.

ALCOCK. Oh, of course, England is right and Ireland is wrong, the Republicans commit murder, the Black and Tans commit—accidents.

MRS. ALCOCK. That's stupid—and unkind. I'm not as crude as that.

ALCOCK. Forgive me, my dear. I'm all on edge. Maggie Leahy's death seems the last straw. Let's talk of something else, something quite off the point—avalanches or irregular French verbs.

MRS. ALCOCK. I suppose I'm on edge too, that's why I say we both want a holiday. . . . Shall we have coffee here on the chance of Kate coming in?

ALCOCK. Yes. (MRS. ALCOCK *rings*.)

ALCOCK. Even if I'd go away, Kate wouldn't.

MRS. ALCOCK. Kate, more than either of us, should go away. I'll try again to persuade her to go. The horrible affair this afternoon may have shaken her nerve.

ALCOCK. After all—though one would never have wanted them to come, all these horrors I mean, though one would have done everything in one's power to stop them—now that they're here it's all, in a sense, enriching. I mean Kate's life has been a richer, graver life than if she'd just

played games and danced herself into matrimony. I don't believe she'd change places with her London cousins.

MRS. ALCOCK. More fool she then. They're all married, at least they will be next month when May marries, and Kate won't even go over to be bridesmaid! I've no patience with her. *(Enter a parlour-maid—ANNIE.)*

MRS. ALCOCK. We'll have coffee here, please, Annie.

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. ALCOCK. I suppose Miss Kate hasn't come in yet?

ANNIE. I haven't seen her, ma'am.

MRS. ALCOCK. I wish she was safely home.

ALCOCK. There's been nothing fresh about poor Mrs. Leahy?

ANNIE. I'm told the husband is nearly demented.

ALCOCK. Poor fellow, no wonder! But it's not true, is it, that the baby was shot too?

ANNIE. I don't think so, sir. But of course I'd put nothing past them 'Tans.

MRS. ALCOCK. Bring us the coffee, please. Is cook keeping something hot for Miss Kate?

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am. . . . Father Doyle says they're a disgrace to civilisation. *(She goes out.)*

MRS. ALCOCK. I don't trust that girl. Sly, like all Irish servants.

ALCOCK. Oh, I don't think so. But I must

say I miss poor old Atkins. I often wish I hadn't pensioned him off. I met him in the village yesterday, he looked so extraordinarily well, I was strongly tempted to bring him back here with me.

MRS. ALCOCK. He's well because he hasn't the run of the cellar. A week here and he'd be as bad as ever.

ALCOCK. For all he'd find in the cellar now! I wonder if my grandfather is turning in his grave.

MRS. ALCOCK. Why should he?

ALCOCK. Oh, we must seem shockingly degenerate. No hunters in the stables, no swilling of claret, no card-playing. In this part of the country the eighteenth century lasted right down to the seventies, society even in my father's time was like one of Balzac's provincial novels. . . . Well, if grandfather upbraids me in the next world I'll retaliate by upbraiding him for stripping this room of its pictures. There was a Romney there, just opposite to me, my father remembered it as a child, and my great grand-uncle hung over the fire—a dashing portrait of him in his admiral's dress with a sea-fight in the background, and they and all the others were sold to a little Jew in Limerick for a few beggarly pounds—they didn't even pay grandfather's racing debts.

MRS. ALCOCK. It was shameful of him to strip the house the way he did.

ALCOCK. I'm afraid I can't take a very high line about it, I grumble because he left me so little that *I* can sell. I really must get money somewhere.

MRS. ALCOCK. It made me simply furious this morning when I was walking back from the village and the Goods flashed past me in their motor choking me with dust. To think of all the rent they owe us! And their car isn't a Ford either, oh dear me no, some very expensive make Mrs. Brown told me. Is there no way of making them and all the others pay?

ALCOCK. None.

MRS. ALCOCK. I call them common thieves.

ALCOCK. Well, we can console ourselves with the thought that either the Republicans or the Black and Tans will commandeer their car one of these days.

(ANNIE comes in with the coffee, which she puts before MRS. ALCOCK and goes out.)

ALCOCK *(taking his coffee from MRS. ALCOCK)*. Thank you. . . . Aren't you having any?

MRS. ALCOCK. I don't think so.

ALCOCK. Why not?

MRS. ALCOCK. It would keep me awake.

ALCOCK. It never used to. Aren't you sleeping well?

MRS. ALCOCK. Not very—lately.

ALCOCK. Ah! lying awake imagining you hear the tread of strange feet on the gravel, a hammering on the door, a rattle of petrol tins,

there's a click of a revolver, a scratch of a match,
a——

MRS. ALCOCK. Don't, don't, St. Leger, *please!*

ALCOCK. My dear, are you really frightened?

MRS. ALCOCK. Terrified.

ALCOCK. I had no idea. . . . You really lie
awake——?

MRS. ALCOCK. Listening. Till the light
comes. Thank God the nights are short.

ALCOCK. How long has this been going on?

MRS. ALCOCK. Since the spring. No, always.

ALCOCK. Always?

MRS. ALCOCK. Never as bad as now, of course,
but I've always felt strange, felt afraid.

ALCOCK. Good God! You've never got used
to Ballydonal?

MRS. ALCOCK. Never quite used.

ALCOCK. It's always seemed a little foreign,
a little queer? My dear Mary, why didn't you
tell me?

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh, it's nothing to fuss about.
I can stand it, I've stood it for more than twenty
years. But I feel—just for the sake of sleeping
again—I'd like to spend a month or two in some
very dull London suburb; Ealing, I think, for
choice.

(KATE comes in very pale and tired.)

MRS. ALCOCK. My dear, how late you are, I
was getting anxious. Do they know you're in?
Mrs. Moloney is keeping something hot for you.

KATE. I came in the back way. Mrs.

Moloney knows. She's sending me up some tea.

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh nonsense, you must have some dinner.

KATE. I couldn't, mother, really. I couldn't eat anything. (*She sits at the table.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. Just a little soup?

KATE. No really, thanks.

(*ALCOCK goes to the sideboard and pours something into a glass.*)

ALCOCK. Here, drink this.

KATE. What is it?

ALCOCK. Whisky.

KATE. Oh no, I couldn't, I don't want it——

ALCOCK. Now, no nonsense. Drink it down. (*She does so. Suddenly she's afraid she's going to cry and gets up and goes to the window and stands looking out with her back to the room. Her mother is about to go to her.*)

ALCOCK (*in a low voice*). Let her alone, she'll pull herself together.

MRS. ALCOCK (*low*). She shouldn't have gone, we shouldn't have let her.

KATE (*turning round*). I'm sorry. I'm all right now. (*She comes and sits down at the table.*)

ALCOCK. Do you want to talk, my dear, or would you rather be all alone?

KATE. I don't mind. . . . It was very dreadful but I don't think she can have suffered, Doctor Hennessy is sure it was instantaneous. She was sitting on the bank by the road with the

baby in her arms, Pat was working in the field behind her. He never heard the lorry till it came round the corner from the cross. They only fired two shots he says. One of them hit her in the breast, I don't know how the poor baby escaped.

ALCOCK. But—but—the whole thing seems incredible. . . . Were they blind drunk?

KATE. Nobody knows. I suppose they're in an awful state of nerves and fury after the ambush last night. Father Doyle is afraid they'll burn the village to-night.

ALCOCK. He was there—at the Leahys' cottage I mean?

KATE. Yes, and Mrs. Brown came, Mr. Brown is away until to-morrow. Mrs. Brown was splendid with all the children—six of them, imagine, and all so young. Pat was useless, simply blubbered like a child. Mrs. Murphy's taken the baby, its arm got bruised when poor Maggie fell off the bank.

MRS. ALCOCK. Can we send down anything? Food?

KATE. I think they've everything. I'll bring down a lot of flowers to-morrow, Maggie liked flowers.

(Enter ANNIE with the tea.)

KATE. Thank you, Annie. *(ANNIE goes.)*

MRS. ALCOCK. Take a few strawberries, Kate. The first this year.

KATE. Thanks. *(But she doesn't take any.)*

MRS. ALCOCK (*pouring her out some tea*). That will do you good.

KATE. Don't bother about me, I'll be all right. Go to the drawing-room, mother, please, I'd rather you would.

MRS. ALCOCK. I'd like to stay and see you eat a good tea.

KATE. I'll do that all right. Please don't wait, do go.

MRS. ALCOCK. Will you promise me to eat something?

KATE. Yes, I promise.

MRS. ALCOCK. And if you feel you'd like something more substantial, you've only got to ring the bell and Mrs. Moloney will send you up something nice.

KATE. Yes, I know.

MRS. ALCOCK. And you'll come to the drawing-room when you've finished?

KATE. Yes, I'll come. I won't be long.

MRS. ALCOCK. Come, St. Leger. (*She goes. ALCOCK follows her as far as the door and turns back.*)

ALCOCK. I don't like leaving you, Kitty.

KATE. I'm all right now. I was silly for a minute.

ALCOCK. Well, no wonder.

KATE. "And no one but the baby cried for poor Lorraine, Lorree." That's been running in my head all the evening. So silly, for we all cried. . . . I suppose I'll see some

meaning in it some time. Of course we read of much worse horrors in the war, but to see it—and she was my nurse—a friend really—I gave her her wedding dress, do you remember? and the first baby was called after me.

ALCOCK. Yes, and Pat's father was gardener here for thirty years. They're really part of the family, one of ourselves.

KATE (*sombrely*). No, that's just what they're not.

ALCOCK. Not?

KATE. Not us, we're not them. That was the awful thing I realised this evening. There I was in that cottage with the neighbours and Father Doyle and Doctor Hennessy and I knew Maggie better than any of them, and I—I was an outsider.

ALCOCK. What do you mean?

KATE. Just what I say. An outsider. Something outside, different, away from them.

ALCOCK. When death is in question one feels, of course, that religion makes such a difference.

KATE. Yes, there was religion to make me feel outside but lots of other things too; education, I suppose, and tradition and—and everything that makes me me and them them. Between us and them, like the people in the Bible, there was a "great gulf fixed".

ALCOCK. I know no one who has made less

of the gulf than you, Kitty. Your democracy shocks your mother.

KATE (*impatiently*). Oh yes, I threw a bridge across the gulf and ran across it and called Pat, Mick, and Larry by their Christian names, and hobnobbed with priests and creamery managers and Gaelic teachers—but it was only a bridge, the gulf remained and when the moment came they instinctively forced me to stand on the farther side. Oh, it wasn't only to-night I've felt it. I've been conscious of it ever since I've been conscious of anything, but I thought it could be broken down.

ALCOCK. Your politics aren't extreme enough.

KATE. It's not that. They could forgive me for not being an out-and-out Republican. There's something deeper, something that none of us can put into words, something instinctive, this "them" and "us" feeling.

ALCOCK. History.

KATE. I think I'd like it better if they hated us. That at least would make me feel that we had power, that we counted for something ; it's very hard to forgive toleration.

ALCOCK. And it's hard for us not to seem to patronise.

KATE. I don't patronise, I never have. I sit on committees like every ordinary member. I sit with school-children at the Gaelic classes because I'm such a dunce at Gaelic. We're as poor as mice, we don't keep up any style.

We're as Irish as most of them, we're honest and hard-working,

ALCOCK. I suppose they feel——

KATE. "They, they, they!" Why should there be any "they"? I was made to feel in that cottage this evening that *I* had shot Mary, and yet they know perfectly well that I've no sympathy with the Auxiliaries.

ALCOCK. You're overwrought, my dear. You're exaggerating very much.

KATE. No, I'm not. What I'm saying is true, and you know it is. Van O'Neill is an ignorant clod, Father Doyle compared with him is a paragon of culture, but you're uncomfortable when Father Doyle comes here, you're not speaking your full mind to him, he's not speaking his full mind to you, but you're quite happy and easy with poor ignorant Van.

ALCOCK. I've known Van all his life.

KATE. I've known the people in the village all my life. I've worked with them, quarrelled with them, loved them, but at the end of it all I find myself—just different.

ALCOCK. Maybe it's right we should be different.

KATE. How can it be right? I want to be the same.

ALCOCK. You'll never be that.

KATE. Why not?

ALCOCK. It will be always "them" and "us".

KATE. I feel sick and discouraged.

ALCOCK. And your mother feels frightened.

KATE. Frightened? Of what?

ALCOCK. Everything. She says she's never felt quite at home here.

KATE. Yes, it must be worse for her—no, it's worst for me with the Irish side of me tormenting me. Let's give up, chuck up the sponge.

ALCOCK. Kate!

KATE. We're "going, going, going——" like a battered old piece of furniture at an auction. Let's smash the hammer down ourselves and cry "gone".

ALCOCK. Yes, go, Kate, go. You and your mother.

KATE. And you?

ALCOCK. No, no, I can't go yet.

KATE. Yet? What worse are you waiting for?

ALCOCK. I don't know.

KATE. I know. It's your devilish pride.

ALCOCK. I don't think so.

KATE. It's your devilish pride.

ALCOCK. No, no. It's—somehow I'd feel it physically impossible to go just now.

KATE. Yes. You're devilishly proud.

ALCOCK. Nonsense. . . . Your mother will be wondering where I am. I'd better join her. Come to the drawing-room as soon as you can.

KATE. All right.

(ALCOCK goes out.)

(Left to herself KATE drinks a little tea disheartedly. A minute later ANNIE comes in.)

ANNIE (*planting an egg on the table*). Mrs. Moloney sent this up, miss.

KATE. Oh thanks, thank Mrs. Moloney.

ANNIE. Aren't you cold with the window open, miss?

KATE. I don't think so.

ANNIE. There's a terrible breeze blowing in.
(*She half closes the casement window.*)

KATE. It's getting very dark, isn't it, or is it very late?

ANNIE. 'Tis like as if there was going to be a storm, or thunder maybe. (*She is going out.*)

KATE (*suddenly and decisively*). Annie!

ANNIE. Yes, miss.

KATE. Shut the door. Come here. I want you to tell me something.

ANNIE (*wonderingly*). Yes, miss?

KATE. If the Black and Tans burn the village to-night will we be burned out the next night?

ANNIE. Oh, miss!

KATE. Will we?

ANNIE. Such a thing to say!

KATE. Will we, will we?

ANNIE. Sure how could I say?

KATE. I know you can't say definitely "yes" or "no". But you can tell me whether you

think it's likely. Your brother—well, I know what he is as well as you do—is he likely to look on us as a suitable reprisal?

ANNIE (*vaguely*). Miss!

KATE. He burned the O'Neills.

ANNIE (*with contempt*). Ah sure, the O'Neills!

KATE. Exactly. That's what I want to know. Will there be any difference made between them and us? Will all the master has done for the district count for anything?

ANNIE. Everyone has a great respect for the master and for yourself too, Miss.

KATE. I know. But how much respect? Enough to save us? I'm only asking as a matter of curiosity; if you tell me they will burn us I shan't do anything about it—as a matter of fact there's nothing to be done—but I just want to know.

ANNIE. I don't know why you ask me, miss.

KATE. I don't know why I shouldn't ask you. We've known each other ever since we were children; you know as much about what's going on in the village as any girl in it. I suspect that you know more than any girl. I want a straight answer to a straight question.

ANNIE. Ah, don't bother your head about such things, miss.

KATE. I see. . . . You won't answer me. . . . You're probably right not to. Thank you, you needn't wait. Thank Mrs. Moloney for sending me the egg.

ANNIE. Yes, miss. (*She goes out.*)

KATE (*to herself*). A great gulf fixed. (*She remains brooding, she makes no attempt to eat anything but drinks a little tea. The door opens, DESPARD appears in the uniform of the Auxiliary Police. KATE doesn't stir, they look at each other silently for half a minute.*)

KATE. Why have you come? I told you not to.

DESPARD (*thickly, rather drunkenly*). Professionally.

KATE. What?

DESPARD. Professionally. In the discharge of my duties.

KATE. Do you mean you're stationed here—in Ballydonal? I thought you were in Gormans-town?

DESPARD. Left. Why don't you read my letters?

KATE. I told you why.

DESPARD. Forgot. Shockin' memory.

KATE. I don't correspond with Auxiliaries.

DESPARD. No?

KATE. And I don't want them in this house.

DESPARD. No?

KATE. So will you please go?

DESPARD. This wonderful Irish hospitality! And I've come such a long way to-day, all the way from County Limerick.

KATE. Limerick?

DESPARD. Yes. The hell of a distance, but,

as you were about to remark, lovely day for a drive.

KATE. Why? Why do you come?

DESPARD. Pleasure—and a duty. Pleasure to see you, duty to drop across and tell Ballydonal what we think of it.

KATE. To tell——? You——? I understand. How many of you are there?

DESPARD. Cars an' cars an' cars.

KATE. You're going to burn the village, I suppose?

DESPARD. Don't know. Depends.

KATE. Depends on whether you're drunk enough? You're drunk now but not very drunk.

DESPARD. You are going it, Kate.

KATE. What do you want here, in this house?

DESPARD. Stayed here once. Finding myself passing your gate felt it was only commonly polite to call on you.

KATE. Passing the gate . . . were you on the road between this and the village about four o'clock this afternoon?

DESPARD. No. Only just arrived.

KATE. Ah!

DESPARD. Why d'you ask?

KATE. Nothing.

DESPARD. My chaps searching your yard.

KATE. Searching the yard? In the name of goodness for what?

DESPARD. Anything in trousers that might be hiding in loft or coach-house. Said I'd wait

for them here. Damned rude, Kate, you might ask me to sit down or have a drink—*and* have a drink I mean.

KATE (*getting up*). Take your men away, Captain Despard, take them away. You'll scare mother out of her wits. I give you my word of honour we're hiding no one in the house or in the yard.

DESPARD. Your word! My dear Kate! I said to the driver as we passed your gate "Taylor" (that's his name), "Taylor, that's Ballydonal House and there's a girl there who's as damned a little Sinn Feiner as any I know. Stop the car, turn round——"

KATE. Captain Despard——

DESPARD. Monty, Kate, Monty. This stand-offishness, so uncalled for, unexpected——

KATE. Will you please, for the sake of the good friends we were once, go quietly away?

DESPARD. Remarked before — wonderful Irish hospitality, traditional. Well, I've learned not to wait to be asked. (*He sits down and pours himself out some whisky.*)

KATE (*reaching for the decanter*). Please, please, Monty——

DESPARD. Hands off! The dust of these roads. You wouldn't grudge an old friend a drink. (*He drinks.*) As you remarked we were good friends. (*KATE moves towards the door, DESPARD gets between her and it.*) Where are you going?

KATE. To mother.

DESPARD. No. No warnings. Not allowed. You stay here, see? My business keep you here. House must be searched.

KATE. How ridiculous.

DESPARD (*suddenly blazing out*). Yes, damned funny, like the ambush last night. Frightfully funny joke for the fellows who went west.

KATE. You know perfectly well we had nothing to do with the ambush.

DESPARD. Not guts enough. 'Scuse my language. But true. Whiners, that's what you are. "Why doesn't the Government. . . . Must establish law and order. . . . But Black and Tans are rather naughty." Compromise, conference, save your bacon. Wow, wow.

(KATE *turns away from the door and walks to the other side of the room.* DESPARD *goes back to the table and drinks again.*)

DESPARD. Your father used to brag of his cellar, I remember. How's the old boy?

KATE (*turning round*). You realise that if you burn the village as a reprisal we'll probably be burned as another reprisal?

DESPARD. Unfortunate. Got to think of the murder of those chaps. Must punish. Must make Ballydonal squeal.

KATE. It was strangers did it, no one from this village.

DESPARD. Yes, always the naughty boys in

the next parish. Heard that tale too often. Cuts no ice.

KATE. Monty, if I could bring those poor men back from the dead I'd do so, believe me I would. But they've been avenged. This afternoon a poor woman sitting by the road nursing a baby was shot dead by some Auxiliaries who were passing in a lorry. Won't you take that as your vengeance, and let the village alone?

DESPARD. Spying. I know these women.

KATE. She wasn't spying, she was only a poor labourer's wife sitting in the sunshine with her baby. I've known her all my life, she was my nurse when *I* was a baby.

DESPARD. Your nurse?

KATE. Yes. How would you feel if it had been your nurse.

DESPARD. Damnable.

KATE. Yes, damnable. It's all damnable, Monty, you and us and everything, but it won't be so damnable if because poor Maggie is dead you turn round your cars and go quietly home.

DESPARD. Home? What the hell d'you mean?

KATE. Home to Limerick.

DESPARD. Limerick? Home? Up Garryowen! More Irish than the Irish, you see.

KATE. Go home altogether, back to England, and we can be friends again.

DESPARD. Friends? Only friends?

KATE. Good friends.

DESPARD. I'd do a lot for you, Kitty.

KATE. I know you would. Do this.

DESPARD. Damn me, we will be friends again, Kitty, damn me, we will. Give me a kiss and say you forgive and forget.

KATE. Oh Monty, nonsense.

DESPARD. It's not nonsense. It's God's truth. Say you forget and forgive, kiss me and say you'll marry me and I'll spare the damned village.

KATE. Rubbish.

DESPARD. How rubbish?

KATE. This is County Cork, not third-rate melodrama.

DESPARD. What d'you mean?

KATE. You're behaving like the hero—or the villain—in a cheap novel.

DESPARD. You're damned superior.

KATE. You're not.

DESPARD. Won't quarrel with you, improves you to lose your temper. I'll kiss and be friends.

KATE. I won't.

DESPARD. Oh yes, you will. . . . Come here.

KATE. Don't be silly.

DESPARD (*going to her*). I mean it. Kiss me.

KATE. No.

DESPARD. Kiss me, you—— (*He struggles with her, overpowers her, kisses her violently, repeatedly, suddenly he softens, grows tearfully tender.*) Kitty, Kitty, Kitty.

KATE. Monty, poor Monty.

DESPARD (*crying*). Kitty, Kitty.

KATE (*soothing him*). Hush, hush.

DESPARD. It's hell, Kitty, it's hell.

KATE. I know, I know.

DESPARD. You can't know how hellish.

KATE. My poor Monty.

DESPARD. The hot nights—that awful little barracks, the rotten chaps that are there, and never knowing when—who——

KATE. Yes, yes, I know.

DESPARD. It wasn't like this in France. I wish I were back there, I'd give my soul to be back there.

KATE. Get out of it. Give it up. Go back to England.

DESPARD (*shaking himself free of her*). I'll see it through. The lice! We'll give 'em as hard as they give us and just a little bit harder.

(MR. ALCOCK *comes in*.)

ALCOCK. Your mother is wondering——
Good gracious!

KATE. It's Captain Despard, father.

DESPARD. Evening, Mr. Alcock, how are you? Unexpected pleasure.

KATE. Captain Despard's men are just having a look round the yard. I explained, of course, that there was nobody—nothing—there for them to find and they will be gone in a few minutes. Perhaps you had better go to mother in case she hears anything and is frightened.

DESPARD. Not an unfriendly visit, Alcock, don't take it unfriendly.

ALCOCK. I'll take it as I please.

KATE. Will you go, father? I'll look after Captain Despard.

DESPARD. Yes, Kitty's turning duty into pleasure.

ALCOCK. Come on, Kitty.

DESPARD (*holding her arm*). No, no, cruel——

ALCOCK (*suddenly exploding*). Let my daughter alone.

KATE (*getting to ALCOCK*). Father!

ALCOCK. Do your duty, damn you, as quickly as you can, and clear out of my house.

DESPARD. Mind what you're saying, Alcock.

ALCOCK. Mind your own business.

DESPARD. You're all my business. You and your lovely village and Kitty——

ALCOCK. Leave my daughter . . . (*KATE is trying to quiet him.*) Let me alone, Kitty.

KATE. Come to mother, father.

DESPARD. Yes, clear out of this, do you hear? Clear out, the two of you. (*He whips out his revolver.*)

ALCOCK. By God, if you threaten me——

KATE. Father, hush . . .

DESPARD. Upstairs with you. Hide. Under the bed.

ALCOCK. I see. You are drunk. Very pretty. Kate! (*He opens the door for her.*)

KATE. Not without you.

ALCOCK. I'm coming. (*To DESPARD*) If you want us you will find us in the drawing-room, my wife, my daughter and myself. You know the way, you have been a welcome guest here—when your uniform was a different one.

(*ALCOCK and KATE go out.*)

DESPARD. Old fool!

(*The light has been fading, the room is full of shadows. He gropes for his glass and knocks it over, it breaks.*)

Damn!

(*He drinks straight from the decanter, spilling the whisky down his face. There is a sudden gust of wind, the casement behind him blows open, the curtain blows out into the room. He starts violently and swings round to the window, his revolver in his hand.*)

Hands up! Who are you? Who are you, I say?

A WHISPER OUT OF THE DARKNESS. Ulick!

DESPARD. Ulick? Who are you? I warn you, don't come in through that window, don't, I say. Hands up or I fire. (*He fires rapidly in the direction of the window two or three shots. The glass splinters and falls. He blows a whistle.*) Taylor! Taylor!

(*He fires again.*)

SCENE III

An evening in February 1923. The same scene as the previous one, but the room is somewhat changed, it is less emphatically a dining-room and more of a sitting-room. A comfortable arm-chair is above the fire, and in it MRS. ALCOCK is sitting knitting and reading, the room is lit by an oil-lamp on the dining-room table, and there are a pair of candles on a little table beside MRS. ALCOCK. Half a minute after the curtain rises ANNIE comes into the room, she has a large bundle of letters, newspapers, and postal packages in her hand.

ANNIE (*bringing them to* MRS. ALCOCK). The post, ma'am.

MRS. ALCOCK. Letters! Oh, what a surprise!

ANNIE. And the postman said Miss Doyle told him to tell you there'd be likely be a post going out to-morrow about twelve o'clock.

MRS. ALCOCK. To-morrow? I see. I'll have a lot of letters to go. Will you tell the master that letters have come? He's in the library.

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am. (*She goes out.*) MRS. ALCOCK sorts the mail and starts to open her own letters. ALCOCK comes in, he is dressed in a dark lounge suit, he has a sheet of paper—an unfinished letter in his hand.

MRS. ALCOCK. Letters, St. Leger. But only two from Kate!

ALCOCK. How is she?

MRS. ALCOCK. I haven't had time to read them yet. Those are yours, they don't look very exciting, and there are all these *Times* and the *Lit. Sup.* and *Punch* and *The Saturday Review*—plenty of reading anyhow.

ALCOCK (*a little petulantly throwing the newspapers on the table*). I'll give up the *Times*. Newspapers are bad enough taken in small daily doses, but when they arrive *en masse* they are completely indigestible, they're only waste of money.

MRS. ALCOCK. Only a few lines from Kate . . . had a bit of a cold and very busy at the office . . . oh, she's changing her rooms, going to a boarding-house just off Bloomsbury Square . . . Oh, imagine, St. Leger! Van O'Neill is going to be married! Isn't that amazing?

ALCOCK. Well, why shouldn't he? Who's he marrying?

MRS. ALCOCK. Kate doesn't know, Sissy just sent her a card asking her to go round to dinner and she'd tell her about Van who was engaged

to be married. . . . That *is* exciting. . . . The next letter will tell me. (*She searches for it and opens it.*)

ALCOCK (*opening and tearing up letters*). No, I do *not* want to lay down a hard tennis-court . . . *nor* install central heating . . . *nor* do I want to re-stock my cellar . . . stupid advertisers are, have they no imagination, do they never read the papers? . . . ah, a money-lender, he's more in the picture . . . (*but he tears it up*) . . . your subscription . . . due . . . Yes, I expect it is, don't they wish they may get it. . . . Your subscription . . . What a post, I can't face it to-night.

MRS. ALCOCK (*having glanced through KATE's other letter*). This one is written earlier than the other, so we'll have to wait to hear about Van. It would be just like him to go and make a grand match. Look at Flossie marrying that Bradford millionaire. (*She attacks other letters. ALCOCK bundles his torn papers into the fire.*) . . . Oh, Margaret's gone to Bournemouth, she likes the rooms and it's very mild she says. She'll stay there till Easter, then she's due at the Coddingtons, I must write to her to-night. . . . Did Annie tell you that there's a post out to-morrow, at twelve?

ALCOCK. No.

MRS. ALCOCK. So if you have anything it must be ready by eleven. Have you finished your letter to Cosgrave?

ALCOCK (*troubled, getting the sheet of paper he has carried in with him*). No. It doesn't satisfy me, I feel it's so inadequate. I'm sure he won't pay any attention to it—a letter from someone he's never seen, probably never heard of—in his place and with as much to do as he has, *I'd* pay no attention.

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, by writing you've done all you can do.

ALCOCK. You talk as if I was writing just to satisfy myself, not really with the object of saving Nicholas. You know it's come back on us like a boomerang—all these letters I've written for years and years recommending idle wastrels as being sober, industrious and entirely trustworthy. Now when I write something that's true, and when it's a matter of life and death no attention will be paid to it. I really think I should go to Dublin and try to see the President myself.

MRS. ALCOCK. What nonsense. In this weather. It's a terrible journey.

ALCOCK. I hate to leave you alone—if only Kitty wasn't in London. You wouldn't come with me?

MRS. ALCOCK. It's so unnecessary.

ALCOCK. It's a matter of life and death, and Nicholas is such a sterling fine fellow.

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh, they won't execute him. Condemning him to death is only to scare people. He'll be kept in prison for a couple

of months and then he'll be made a cabinet minister. They're all the same gang.

ALCOCK. My dear, it's not all bluff; they *have* executed people. There's no shutting our eyes to the fact that Nicholas is in very grave danger.

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, he's got no one but himself to thank for the scrape he's in. You're not pretending you approve of what he's done?

ALCOCK. Of course not. But if I could make the President realise that he's not just disorderly, not the common kind of gun-man, that he's a man of very high principles and fine motives——

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh, every murder no doubt committed from the highest motives!

ALCOCK (*sighs, gives it up*). I'll think it over to-night, if I could be even sure of the post getting quickly through to Dublin, but the mail might be raided, the letters might never get through at all.

MRS. ALCOCK. The letters are going all right now. Don't worry about it to-night anyway. Give me *Punch* and play me something.

ALCOCK (*handing her Punch*). Here you are. (*He goes to a cottage piano.*) What shall I play?

MRS. ALCOCK. Anything you like. (*He sits at the piano, worrying, he doesn't play.*)

MRS. ALCOCK (*discovering something in Punch*). Listen to this, St. Leger, this is rather good.

“According to an evening paper Mr. G. F. Preston, London Telephone Controller, who is retiring at the end of this month, has held the post for eleven years. We congratulate him in spite of our suspicions that this is the wrong number.” Really, *Punch* is very witty.

ALCOCK (*not listening*). Yes.

MRS. ALCOCK. And listen to this : “A garden-party on a gigantic scale is to be held at Los Angeles. We understand that tickets will be issued to admit “bearer and one wife”. Isn’t that amusing? (*She notices that he is paying no attention.*) Do play something, dear, take your mind off things.

ALCOCK. Yes. (*He plays for a moment or two.*) This beastly piano, it’s out of tune too. (*He gets up.*) I can’t play it. There must be a fire in the music-room to-morrow, the Steinway is getting damp.

MRS. ALCOCK. Very well.

ALCOCK. This room is cold too.

MRS. ALCOCK. You got perished sitting all the evening in that icy library. Sit near the fire and poke it up.

ALCOCK. Would you think it horrible of me to go to bed? I feel cold and cross. I’ll only snap if I stay here.

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes, do go to bed, you look wretched. I’ll bring you a hot drink in bed.

ALCOCK. Ah, you needn’t bother.

MRS. ALCOCK. I’ll bring it in a quarter of an

hour. Take something to read, the *Saturday Review*—or take *Punch*, I can read it to-morrow.

ALCOCK. No thanks, too contemporary. I have *Tristram Shandy* upstairs. Sterne is pleasantly remote. Are you coming to bed soon?

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes, I won't be very long after you. (*KATE has entered very quietly, she is in hat and coat.*)

ALCOCK. Really I feel inclined never to get up, just lie in bed till the summer and read the classics, and never, never look at a newspaper or hear any horrible "news".

KATE. No, you're not going to bed as early as you think.

ALCOCK. } Good gracious!

MRS. ALCOCK. } Kate!

(*KATE flings herself round her father, and then on her mother.*)

ALCOCK. Kitty, is it possible?

KATE. Looks like it.

MRS. ALCOCK. My dear! How? Why?

KATE. Sorry to take you by surprise like this——

ALCOCK. Oh, don't apologise.

KATE. But everything's so uncertain, I didn't know if I'd ever arrive.

MRS. ALCOCK. How did you get here? You're starving, I'm sure. Ring for Annie.

KATE. They know, they're bringing tea. I came on Lordan's lorry from Cork; my, such a jolting, three bridges down, and we had to take

to the fields and pay toll to every farmer. I walked up from the village lugging my suitcase. (*To her mother*) You're looking blooming. (*Looking at her father*) The boss is a little—a little wizened—I think that's the word.

ALCOCK. I'll get my bloom back now that you've come.

KATE (*taking off her hat and coat and flinging herself into a chair*). My, it's good to be back. As the man said when he saw Rome—"You can 'ave Rome." Well, you can 'ave London. Never again, my dears, never again, except for a fortnight's holiday once a year.

MRS. ALCOCK. Do you mean you've left for good—not just for a little holiday? But Mr. Scholes——?

KATE. I'm afraid you have me for good and all. Yesterday—or the day before—all this slow travelling has muddled my dates, I just felt I could bear it no longer. Columns in the papers about country-houses going up in flames, senators being kidnapped and all kinds of thrilling goings-on, and there I was secretarying for Scholes, dear siring and dear madaming and referring to theirs of the ult. and the inst. No, it was not to be borne. So I just up and told him I was going and swep out.

MRS. ALCOCK. But surely you had to give him a month's notice?

KATE. Of course. That was what made him so cross. He didn't much mind my going—I'm

a rotten secretary I expect—but he did mind my not giving him a month's notice. It hurt his sense of decency. Your countrymen are very queer, mother, the things that shock them—and the things that don't.

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, a bargain is a bargain.

KATE. Of course it is, darling.

ALCOCK. Oh, damn Scholes. You're here, that's the great thing.

MRS. ALCOCK. It's so disorderly, so—so Irish to run away like that.

KATE. I know it is, but I just felt " Oh, damn Scholes ", and said it.

MRS. ALCOCK. You didn't, Kate.

KATE. Practically; getting back here was all that mattered. I suppose he can have the law on me if he likes but he won't, he's too decent, he's got a nice tame English secretary by this time and is blessing his stars to be rid of me. But you're quite right, mother, in saying it was so Irish of me to cut and run, that's why I ran, because I felt myself going to pieces.

MRS. ALCOCK. How, Kate?

KATE. Morally, mamma dear. You've no idea what it's like in London now, how an Irish girl feels, the things people say, the things the papers say, the " we-told-you-so-ness " of them all. Well you can take it in either of two ways, either you're a martyred emigré like Margaret de Burgh and are shown off and have people

asked to meet you, and carry pictures of your castle *before* the fire and *after* the fire (so like an advertisement for a hair-restorer or a baby-food—why doesn't Shell or Pratts take it up "Before using our No. 1 spirit the castle was like this—after—!"), and you dress very plainly and get asked out to very good luncheons and talk of being betrayed by England, thrown to the wolves, call yourself an outpost of the Empire and how you made a gallant last stand and, altogether, are more "I-told-you-so" than any-one else. (*She pauses for breath.*)

ALCOCK. Jealous! *You* had no photographs, we're still intact.

KATE. Exactly. I had no photographs. So I had to take it the other way, which means that I simply went livid green. I just damned people, I insulted the emigrés, I loathed their long, gloomy, Protestant faces, their whines and their appetite for luncheons; I insulted the English, I told them it was none of their business what we did with our own country, and anyway as we'd beaten them it would be more becoming if they kept their mouths shut. I made myself thoroughly objectionable to everyone and then I suddenly realised that I was behaving like any Irish girl in a tenth-rate novelette written by some horrible Colonial, that I was being "so Irish" as mother calls me. That shocked me profoundly, and I knew that for my soul's salvation the sooner I left the better, and I realised I'd

better leave quick or may be there'd be nothing to come back to. And here I am.

ALCOCK. We're not likely to be burned, I'm not a Senator.

MRS. ALCOCK. Thank God.

KATE. Well, anyway I'm here, and now I'll be able to be myself again. I'll criticise and dislike Irish people—some of them—and be either a Free Stater or a Republican, I suppose I've got to be one or the other. In London, you know, I was just blatantly Irish, I wouldn't stand a word against De Valera *or* Cosgrave. . . . Oh, mother darling, I know I'm a disappointment to you coming back like this after all the trouble you took and the strings you pulled to get Scholes to take me and I know you wanted me to marry some nice quiet Englishman—but I've stood it for nearly a year and I couldn't bear it any longer and no nice Englishman wanted to marry me—not even a nasty one—I've had no followers, not one. I'm a failure, I'm back on your hands—for keeps.

MRS. ALCOCK. Darling, it's lovely to have you.

ALCOCK. By Jove, it is. It's not been fun—this winter.

KATE. I suppose it hasn't. I suppose we've all been telling lies to each other for the last six months, you telling me everything was splendid and not to mind what the papers said, and I telling you that there was no place like London.

. . . Well, we needn't pretend any more to each other. God, it's grand to be back to real things even if they're hideous things. In London—apart from the struggle to make a living—everything seems just sentimental play-acting. It's—it's fuzzy.

MRS. ALCOCK (*bitterly*). Sentimental? If you want sentiment in its essence you have it here.

KATE. Yes, I know. But you'll die for it. It's not fuzzy to die.

ALCOCK. Oh Kate—no, I won't bother you with it to-night.

KATE. What is it? No, do tell me. I'm back for everything bad and good.

ALCOCK. It's Nicholas O'Connor—you remember Nicholas, Jer. O'Connor's son?

KATE. Of course. Ulick thought so much of him, he got you to send him to the Model Farm. I thought you had put him in charge of the farms at Ballymacduff.

ALCOCK. He left early in the summer. He went very Republican you know. I lost sight of him, apparently he was in the West fighting all the autumn. He's been captured and condemned to death.

KATE. Nicholas! Oh, father!

ALCOCK. Yes. I only heard to-day. A three days' old paper I saw.

KATE. But can't something be done? Nicholas was one in a thousand.

ALCOCK. I know. I've written a letter to

Cosgrave—half-written it, but it seems inadequate, I don't believe he'll pay much attention to it, he doesn't know me. I thought I ought to go to Dublin and see him but I didn't like leaving your mother.

KATE. Oh go, I'm here now. Mother—imagine Nicholas—oh, it's too horrible.

ALCOCK. You've not come home to a picnic.

KATE. No. Forgive me for saying all those silly things, that was the end of the novelette, I'll try and be decent now. Yet I do like real things, if there has to be a battle I don't want it to be a sham-fight. . . . How fond Ulick was of Nicholas. They used to fish together as boys, do you remember?

ALCOCK. Yes.

KATE. And they worked at Gaelic together in Ulick's holidays—but Ulick was better at Gaelic than Nick.

ALCOCK. I must save him, he was a decent fine fellow. Of course I don't approve of what he's done but—— (To MRS. ALCOCK) My dear, you won't mind my going now?

MRS. ALCOCK. No. It was wicked of me to try to stop your going before. God knows I don't wish his death . . . there's been enough killing. . . . His mother . . . (*she pulls herself together, she won't be "sentimental"*). Why don't they bring your tea, Kate?

KATE. No hurry. I'm not hungry, too excited. Oh, Sissy O'Neill saw me off. You'll

not be surprised to hear that she "sent her love". The amount of love the O'Neills are always sending, I wonder they have any left.

MRS. ALCOCK. And what's this about Van? I only got your letter to-night—five minutes before you came.

KATE. Oh, my dear, Van is making a splendid match.

MRS. ALCOCK. There, St. Leger! Who is she?

KATE. American, the usual millions but not the usual American, lives in England altogether and likes to be thought English, has an English accent which Sissy speaks of as "magnificent". She's crazy about horses, Van was at Rathconnell's hunting—he *can* ride, poor Van—they met in the hunting field, he courted her from the back of a horse, he proposed to her from the back of a horse—the only place he'd have any courage—and they're to be married next month.

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, if she admires the English accent what does she think of Van's?

KATE. She's obviously very much in love. But Van's has improved. You really wouldn't know any of the O'Neills, burning them out has done wonders for them. There's Flossie with her Bradford woollen man—countless thousands; Sissy in an office, her boss told me the other day she was "invaluable"; Gertie in Bond Street doing people's faces—Gertie who never washed her own! Maggie in a very comfortable little flat looking after her mother,

and Helana in musical comedy. Can you beat it?

MRS. ALCOCK. It's wonderful, it's unbelievable.

KATE. Compared to them I feel I'm a thorough failure, a returned empty. (*She looks round the room.*) But—I knew there was something odd and queer—why are you sitting here? What's that arm-chair doing and the table out of the small drawing-room, why the school-room piano?

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, we haven't been using the drawing-room this winter.

KATE. Why not?

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh, it doesn't seem worth while. Your father is out or in the library all day, we go to bed very early, no one ever calls—there's no one to call except the Browns, and they don't mind sitting in here——

ALCOCK. Don't mind her, Kitty; she's making decent, needless excuses. The truth is we're pretty nearly broke, and she's trying to run the house with only two servants, Annie and the cook. Every room less means a fire less.

KATE. I see. . . You're eating next to nothing, of course; you always had the appetite of wrens, no wonder the boss looks pinched; it's about time I came home.

ALCOCK. Nonsense, we've plenty to eat.

MRS. ALCOCK. But he would give up wine—

even his glass of thin grog before going to bed.

KATE. I've saved ten pounds; I wish it was more, but it's awfully hard to save in London. We'll go on a burst, *pâté de foie gras* for you and champagne for the boss.

MRS. ALCOCK. Darling!

KATE. I suppose no rents are coming in?

ALCOCK. Not a penny for three years.

KATE. Hm . . . We are shrinking, aren't we? Do you remember the first winter of the war we shut up the north wing and did without two servants, the next winter we cut off the central heating, that meant never sitting in the hall, now the drawing-room's gone and the music-room, too, I suppose. Soon we'll be reduced to a single bed-sitting room. . . . Do you think it all minds it—feels it—the house itself I mean—Ballydonal?

ALCOCK. In all the generations it's seen, it must have learnt patience.

KATE. Yes, I suppose an immense toleration for the animals who run about through its passages and rooms, and who pull down a bit here and build it up again fifty years later, and cover its walls with paper and then wash the paper all off, who tear out its vitals to put in hot water pipes and then let the pipes go cold. And feather beds are banished to lofts and wax candles give place to lamps, and they should have gone before this to make place for acety-

lene or electric light, and none of us live any longer or are any the happier, but we scratch and alter, scratch and alter, generation after generation.

ALCOCK. You're becoming quite lyric, Kitty.

KATE. Sorry. But you see when I was away from it I could see it in a way I never could before. When I lived here I couldn't see the house for the rooms.

MRS. ALCOCK. They're awful, all those empty rooms on every side of us—above us all those garrets, below us cellars and empty cellars.

ALCOCK. Never mind, one of these days I'll sell it to the priests or the nuns.

MRS. ALCOCK. I wish you would.

KATE. Is it true that Castle Bewley is to be a training college for South African missionaries?

ALCOCK. Quite true. And Carrigmore, of course, has dedicated itself to the task of converting China. . . . One of these days Ireland will wake up and realise that all its best houses and much of its best land have passed into the hands of landlords who are entirely self-contained, who give no employment, who hold themselves aloof from the life of the community. A curious situation.

KATE. Well, the big houses have had their fling, drank claret deeply in their youth, gambled and horse-raced in their middle-age, so it's right they should be converted and turn pious in their

old age. But I should think Castle Bewley would need not conversion but exorcism.

MRS. ALCOCK. I hear Annie coming. Here's your supper at last.

(The door opens, three young men in trench coats and soft hats appear. The leader of them has a revolver.)

LEADER. Mr. Alcock, you have five minutes to leave the house.

(The ALCOCKS have risen, speechless.)

ALCOCK. What do you want?

LEADER. You have five minutes to get out.

ALCOCK. You—you're going to——

LEADER. Blow it up and burn it. You have five minutes. Will you please leave as quickly as you can, you can take with you anything you like.

ALCOCK *(bewildered)*. Mary——

MRS. ALCOCK *(blazing with indignation, to the leader)*. You dare? You dare? I don't expect you to have sense, that would be asking too much, but have you no decency? Do you know what house you're in, do you know who you're speaking to? Have you ever heard of Ballydona House? Have you ever heard of Mr. St. Leger Alcock?

LEADER. You have five minutes to leave.

MRS. ALCOCK. Don't stand there prating of your five minutes. I'm English, thank God, if I'd my way I'd have been out of this house five years ago, five and twenty years ago.

ALCOCK (*restraining her*). Mary, my dear——

MRS. ALCOCK (*shaking him off*). No, St. Leger . . . (*To the LEADER*) I don't know your face, are you a stranger here? If you are, before you destroy Ballydonal House go down to the village and ask the first person you meet what this house means, ask if anyone was ever turned away hungry from its door, ask them about Mr. Alcock, what he's done for them, the years of his life he's spent on them, the money, the—the—oh, it's monstrous. What was he doing this very evening? Writing a letter to Cosgrave to try and save one of you—one of you who come now to——

ALCOCK. Stop, Mary. We're not begging off.

LEADER. I have my orders. Ye're to go and the sooner the better; I've other work to do to-night.

MRS. ALCOCK. Nicholas O'Connor. He was writing to save his life, and now you——

LEADER. He's after the fair. Nick was executed yesterday.

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh.

ALCOCK. Yesterday? Poor Nicholas!

MRS. ALCOCK. Is that why we're to be burnt? It won't bring him back to life!

LEADER. I'm not here to argue. . . . (*To ALCOCK*) Will you get the women out? They'd better get some coats or something, the night is dry but it's cold.

(ANNIE appears at the door in coat and hat.)

ANNIE (*to LEADER*). Me box and the cook's is in me room corded and all. Will you send the lads to fetch them down.

LEADER (*shortly*). All right.

ANNIE (*insolently taking out a cigarette*). Give me a light.

LEADER. A light?

ANNIE (*with a grin*). You needn't tell me you've no matches. (*He gives her a box, she lights her cigarette.*) I suppose you'll give us a lift to the village.

LEADER. I will not. We're going the other way; I'll leave the boxes at the lodge.

ANNIE. You're not very civil. . . . (*To MRS. ALCOCK*) You owe me a fortnight's wages. You can send it to me, care of Miss Doyle. (*She goes.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. She was packed and ready, she knew!

ALCOCK. Come, my dear. Come, Kate.

KATE (*blazing*). No! they can blow me up here.

ALCOCK. Hush. No use talking like that. On with your coat. (*He helps her into her coat.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. St. Leger! The birds!

ALCOCK. Oh . . . (*To LEADER*) It sounds quite ridiculous, but my wife has some canaries—two large cages—they're upstairs in the old nursery, if we could——?

LEADER (*to the men*). Let ye bring them down and hurry. Where are they?

ALCOCK. Kate, will you show them where they are?

KATE. No.

ALCOCK. I'll show the way myself. . . . See that your mother wraps up well. Now come . . . (*He gets the women out, their heads are high; he turns at the door to the LEADER.*) It's up two flights, I'm afraid, and the cages are awkward things to carry—I'll just see that my wife has her warm coat. (*He disappears.*)

LEADER (*to men*). When you have the birds and the servants' boxes out come back here. We'll put one mine here and another at the library door where Annie Daly showed us. I'll want two tins of petrol here and as many again in the hall, and . . . (*he is continuing his orders when the curtain falls*).

SCENE IV

A corner of the garden. Two high stone walls form a right angle across which has been built a summer-house—a roof supported by a couple of pillars. Below the stone walls are flower borders, empty now except for some withered stems of plants, on the walls some withered creepers and perhaps some evergreen ones, rose-trees gone a little wild. In the summer-house and outside it on the path is a medley of furniture. It is just before sunrise, the morning after the previous scene, a cold light which grows brighter as the scene progresses. ATKINS, collarless, dressed very hastily, and MR. BROWN, also hastily dressed and very dirty, enter carrying between them a sofa.

BROWN (*dropping his end*). Just here, Atkins, we won't take it any further.

ATKINS. I'd like to get it into the summer-house.

BROWN. There's not room. We'll get a cart later on and get all these things over to the rectory.

ATKINS (*rather futilely dusting the sofa*). The murdering rascals. Will we bring the rest of the things, your reverence?

BROWN. I think they're as well on the gravel as they are here—now the summer-house is full. For a wonder it doesn't look like rain. Michael will have an eye to them.

ATKINS. Oh then, I know the sort of an eye Michael Dempsey will have to them, a covetous, thieving eye.

BROWN. Atkins!

ATKINS. Faith, Mary Dempsey will be living like a lady from this out, lolling back on her ladyship's cushions and drinking her tea out of her ladyship's cups.

BROWN. Nonsense. Michael is as honest as the day.

ATKINS. God help you, your reverence, 'tis little you know the class of people that's in this place. I was as innocent as yourself until I went to live beyond in the village. There's neither religion nor decency in the village, a low, thieving, murdering lot. Oh, my eyes were opened, I assure you. I learned things that surprised me, indeed and I did. Thanks be to God I come from the County Tipperary and never set foot in County Cork till I took service with the poor master's father.

BROWN (*sitting on the sofa and lighting a pipe*). I thought I remembered hearing that Tipperary had a reputation for wildness.

ATKINS. To be sure it has, but it's decent kind of wildness; you wouldn't find a thing happening there like what happened here last night—burning Ballydonal House! God forgive me, I could curse like a tinker when I think of it. They're a low, mean, murdering crew, the people in this place, not a one of them would come up with me to lend a hand when the blaze of light on the window woke me this morning, but you'll see they'll be up in an hour's time, nosing around, picking up this thing and that, "saving them" moyah, "keeping them safe for Mr. Alcock against the time he'll be wanting them". Do you know what I'd like to see this minute better than anything else in the world?

BROWN. What?

ATKINS. A regiment of English soldiers and my grandson in the middle of them marching into the village, horse, foot and artillery, and making smithereens of the dirty little houses is there and the dirty little people is living in them, and maybe then they'd know what it is to feel the way the poor mistress feels this minute with her lovely house destroyed on her and she without a roof to shelter her.

BROWN. No, no, you wouldn't wish them that. They're not responsible for what's happened.

ATKINS. Bedad, then, I'd make them responsible, and mark you me, it will come to that yet, and maybe quicker than any of us expect.

BROWN. Come to what?

ATKINS. People high up and low down screeching to the English to come back and protect them from themselves.

BROWN. I don't think that day will ever come.

ATKINS. Indeed and it will. God knows we need protection. How can we live in peace in a little country where everyone knows everyone else and every third man you meet is your second cousin? Sure 'tis well known that relations never agree and every man in Ireland is his own relation.

(*Enter KATE.*)

KATE. Here you are. I've been looking everywhere for you. Wouldn't you like a cup of tea? Michael kindled a fire in the coach-house and we've all been having tea.

BROWN. No thanks, I'm having a pipe instead.

KATE. We've all been washing under the pump. I'm rather proud of the result.

BROWN. I've sent a message to the Goods asking them to send over a car to bring you all across to the rectory.

KATE. Oh, we could walk.

BROWN. The Goods may as well do that much for you.

ATKINS. Them Goods!

BROWN. You might have a look and see whether the car is there, Atkins. They won't know where to find us.

ATKINS. Very well, your reverence. (*He goes out.*)

BROWN. Poor old Atkins is in a state of tearing indignation. He takes it all as a personal insult to the family.

KATE. Yes. . . . What an amount of stuff you've got here!

BROWN. I gave up when the summer-house was full, we'll get it all up to the rectory before night, there are plenty of empty houses in the yard.

KATE (*looking into the summer-house*). What a mixture!

BROWN. It is, rather.

KATE. My God, look! (*She pulls out a picture—Leighton's "Wedded."*) I saved that, Mr. Brown, I saved it, a picture I've always hated and at any rate it's only a cheap reprint. I struggled through smoke and flame to save it and I never remembered till too late those fine Hones in the hall.

BROWN. How could you remember in all the excitement? I do wish I had known an hour earlier than I did.

KATE. Yes, if we'd had someone with a clear head—Father was no use, once he found that there was no chance of saving the beloved Steinway, he just went numb. Mother, though you'd never have thought it, was the best of us, she kept her head and her sense, she made for the right things, made me get the miniatures

and made father get at the safe and the papers.

BROWN. And Atkins?

KATE. Instinctively went for big pieces of furniture, things he'd known all his life, it meant that the nice Chippendale stuff was saved but also this hideous sofa. (*She sits on it.*) I suppose I'm a little hysterical but I can only feel everything—since the horror of the mine—as supremely ridiculous. If you could have seen us—but you can easily imagine it—literally risking our lives for the sake of certain bits of wood and china and glass. And we're supposed to be educated and intelligent and (as you'd remind me) we have immortal souls, but savages from darkest Africa couldn't have fought more desperately for some uncouth image of their god than we did for some piece of wood absurdly carved, for miniatures of our forebears, for Leighton's "Wedded". Pure fetish worship. Now that the excitement is over I realise what savages we were and what a nuisance this jetsam is going to be, so much better if everything had been burned. It's awful to think that we'll have to start again to live up to the Chippendale suite. Couldn't we—oh, don't you think we could—have a little private bonfire here of the contents of the summer-house?

BROWN. The complications with the insurance people would be awful.

KATE. I suppose so. And anyway Mother

has the Chippendales in the coach-house. Joking apart, I'd like to have saved some of the books, a few of Ulick's for old sake's sake.

BROWN. Could you get nothing from the library?

KATE. Nothing. The explosion blocked the door and it went on fire at once. Oh well, a lot of them were very dusty, and most of them I had never read, and God with amazing foresight has created Mr. Andrew Carnegie.

BROWN. I'm glad that Ulick didn't live to see this, it would have broken his heart.

KATE. I wonder would it. We thought very much alike, Ulick and I, and do I look as if my heart was broken?

BROWN. I can't say you do. . . . I expect in your inmost soul you're glad to be quit of it all.

KATE. Glad? I feel—exalted! If only you knew what I feel and I'll tell you—but not now, here's father. Poor darling, he doesn't look exalted, we must get him to the rectory as soon as possible.

(*Enter* ALCOCK.)

ALCOCK. Your mother is wondering where you are.

KATE. I'll go to her. Is she still in the coach-house?

ALCOCK. Yes. I left her feeding the birds.

KATE. Right. I'll be back again. (*She goes.*)

BROWN. Sit down, St. Leger.

THE BIG HOUSE

SCENE

ALCOCK (*sitting on the sofa*). I feel tired.

BROWN. Of course. Have a pipe.

ALCOCK. No thanks. (*Feeling in his pocket.*)
I don't believe I have a pipe.

BROWN. I have a second one—if you don't mind.

ALCOCK. I feel a pipe would make me sick—like a schoolboy. Silly, isn't it. But I'll try a cigarette.

BROWN. The Goods are sending a conveyance to bring you to the rectory and after breakfast I shall pack you all off to bed.

ALCOCK. Yes.

BROWN. Kate is fine.

ALCOCK. Yes. I'm not and I'm not going to try to be fine. I feel as if nothing matters any more, as if everything was over.

BROWN. Ay.

ALCOCK. And that I'm just damned glad it's all over and that there's no reason to make an effort any more, no need to pretend ever again.

BROWN. To pretend what?

ALCOCK. That all this—all life here mattered—to me personally I mean, that I really cared what happened.

BROWN. You cared a lot, my dear man, you've been breaking your heart for four years.

ALCOCK. Because I hate stupidity and cruelty and waste, but not for any other reason. I'd have felt just the same if this had been Abyssinia.

BROWN. I doubt it. . . . And what happens now?

ALCOCK. I haven't an idea. I don't intend to have an idea.

BROWN. Kate——?

ALCOCK. Exactly. Kate. I feel it's Kate's show. I leave it all to her and to my wife. My God, it's a relief to have it all over. I've felt for so many years like a bad actor cast for a part far too heroic for his talents, I haven't had technique enough for it, I haven't in any way been big enough for it, the audience has realised at last what I realised years ago, it's hissed me off the stage and sitting here in the wings wiping off my make-up I'm feeling devilishly relieved, almost happy, but at the same time I feel distinctly sick in the stomach.

BROWN. You want a nip of spirits—whisky or brandy.

ALCOCK. Henry, I'm surprised at you!

BROWN. Oh, for your stomach's sake. There's some at the rectory. For years I've been preaching total abstinence and boasting that I'd never let a drop of the accursed stuff under my roof and I discovered the other day that all the time my wife was squirrelling a bottle of brandy—on the top of the wardrobe in my dressing-room of all places—keeping it for emergencies, she said. It's been there for twenty years. Aren't women the dickens?

ALCOCK. Excellent Alice! It was probably

twenty years old to start with. It will be worth drinking. Do you think she'll consider me an emergency?

BROWN. Surely.

(*Enter MRS. ALCOCK and KATE.*)

MRS. ALCOCK (*fussily*). Now, St. Leger, there's a message from the Goods to say they're sending a car, it will be here in five minutes. Are you ready to come?

ALCOCK. Quite.

MRS. ALCOCK. We'll take the birds with us, they're all right, I fed them just now. Kate has arranged with Michael to have all the things brought over to the rectory and stored there for the present, of course we couldn't trust them here for an hour, and we'll order a motor to take us to Cork this afternoon.

BROWN. Oh, won't you stay at the rectory? We've plenty of room, you're all welcome as long as ever you like to stay.

MRS. ALCOCK. I know it sounds rude but I'd rather go. They've burned us out, we've our pride still I hope—at least I have—I know when I'm not wanted, I take the hint and go and I hope to goodness I never come back.

BROWN *sighs*.

MRS. ALCOCK. Yes, I know it sounds horrible to you, dear Mr. Brown, our best friend here, our oldest friend, but it's because you're such an old friend I can't pretend. But we'll only be parted from you for a little while. You must

follow us, we'll get you some lovely quiet English parish with an ancient beautiful church and you'll be able to put flowers and a crucifix on the altar without your congregation thinking that you are heading straight for Rome.

BROWN. Dear Mrs. Alcock!

MRS. ALCOCK. I mean it. You can't pretend that you'd prefer the horrible bare barrack of a church you have here. St. Leger sits here as if he was dead, but I don't feel a bit dead, I'm an old woman I suppose, but I feel as if life was just beginning for me. Even if we never get a penny of compensation for all this—and I suppose we'll get something—we can't be worse off than we've been here trying to support this white elephant of a house. We'll go to Bournemouth, my sister's there, we'll go to furnished lodgings. Oh, the peace of English furnished lodgings, the beautiful dull respectability of Bournemouth.

ALCOCK. Bournemouth after Ballydonal!

MRS. ALCOCK. Don't get sentimental, St. Leger. Or do, if you like. Have a broken heart, it's quite a comfortable thing to have in a place like Bournemouth.

ALCOCK. What does Kate say?

KATE. It sounds a good plan.

MRS. ALCOCK. Of course it's a good plan.

BROWN. You can leave my English parish out of it. I've been fighting with my Select Vestry for twenty years, they'd think they'd won if I left.

KATE. Oh, I meant for mother and the boss.

MRS. ALCOCK. It's easy to run up to London from Bournemouth, Kate. You can go up for long week-ends.

KATE. Don't bother about me. I'm not in that picture.

MRS. ALCOCK. Where are you then?

KATE. Here. Right here.

MRS. ALCOCK. Rubbish.

KATE. We'll get to Cork this evening, we sleep there and go on to England to-morrow or the next day. We go to Bournemouth, I find you really nice, stuffy, respectable lodgings, I hire a good piano, I stay with you till the Vicar calls on you—that launches you into society—and then I'm coming back.

MRS. ALCOCK. My dear! Nonsense.

KATE (*low, almost singing it*). I'm coming back, I'm coming back, I'm coming back.

MRS. ALCOCK. Where to?

KATE. Atkins' pantry, I think. Did you notice how wonderfully Providence almost completely spared it? I want three pieces of corrugated iron to make a roof and a few little odds and ends—Mr. Brown must get them for me. (BROWN *laughs*.)

MRS. ALCOCK. Oh, I see it's a joke.

KATE. No, it isn't. The corrugated iron part is but the rest isn't. As we are planning our futures I may as well say what I have to say now

as later. I am coming back to live here at Ballydonal.

MR. ALCOCK. Is this bravado or mere obstinacy?

MRS. ALCOCK. As I said before, I have my pride, I know when I'm not wanted.

KATE. I have my pride too. Until last night I thought we were not wanted, that's what sickened me, that's what drove me to work in London, I saw everything sweeping past us and leaving us behind, high and dry like some old wreck, useless and forgotten, I couldn't bear that—my beastly conceit I suppose.

MRS. ALCOCK. And after last night do you feel you're wanted?

KATE. I can't flatter myself that we're wanted, but we're not forgotten—ignored.

MRS. ALCOCK. I could have put up with being forgotten, there are some ways of being remembered——

KATE. I know. "Say it with petrol!" But still, even to have it said that way, to have it said any way——

BROWN. By Jove, I see. Last night showed you that you still mattered.

KATE. More than ever we mattered before. When those men came in I was furiously angry, I'd have shot them if I had had a gun, but deep down in me there was something exulting, some-saying "This is real".

ALCOCK. Your passion for reality, Kitty!

KATE. I mean it was sincere. I've seen time after time father having interviews with people like those young men about one thing or another. but they were never quite real interviews, father wasn't real or they weren't real, but last night!—Did you notice they kept their hats on?

MRS. ALCOCK. I've no doubt they did.

KATE. I don't think they meant to be rude, it was just typical of their attitude towards us, they sort of kept on their hats in their minds. We were equals—except that they had revolvers and we hadn't. It was—it was grand.

MRS. ALCOCK. Well, if it pleases you to know that you're hated, to know that there's no gratitude in the country for all your father has done, you have ample reason for rejoicing. I suppose Annie's falseness and insolence was a great pleasure to you too.

KATE. No, Annie was hateful. But they didn't like her falseness, you could feel they didn't . . . It's not quite that they hate us, it's fear. They're afraid of us.

ALCOCK. "They," "us"! Do you remember, Kate, the evening after Maggie Leahy was shot?

KATE. Yes. But now I don't want to give up the "they" and "us", I glory in it. I was wrong, we were all wrong, in trying to find a common platform, in pretending we weren't different from every Pat and Mick in the village. Do you remember that grey filly we had long

ago that I christened "Pearl" and Michael always called it "Perr'l" and so we all called it "Perr'l" not to seem to criticise Michael's pronunciation? That's a trifling example, but it's the sort of democratic snobbishness we went in for. We were ashamed of everything, ashamed of our birth, ashamed of our good education, ashamed of our religion, ashamed that we dined in the evenings and that we dressed for dinner, and, after all, our shame didn't save us or we wouldn't be sitting here on the remnants of our furniture.

ALCOCK. And what can save you now, it's too late?

KATE. If it was too late they wouldn't have bothered to burn us; *they* don't think it's too late so why should we? They're afraid of us still.

MRS. ALCOCK (*with a bitter laugh*). We do look formidable, don't we?

KATE. We are formidable if we care to make ourselves so, if we give up our poor attempt to pretend we're not different. We must glory in our difference, be as proud of it as they are of theirs.

BROWN. But why?

KATE. Why? What do you mean?

BROWN. Why "must" you glory?

KATE. Why, because we're what we are. Ireland is not more theirs than ours.

BROWN. Or ours than theirs.

KATE. Exactly. But do let's leave them to see their own point of view. We've spent so much time sympathetically seeing theirs that we've lost sight of our own. Ah Mr. Brown, you've been as bad as any.

BROWN. As bad?

KATE. How many converts have you made during the twenty years you've been rector of Ballydonal?

BROWN. Converts? I'm not ministering among the heathen.

KATE. Shouldn't you feel, as a Protestant parson, that Roman Catholics are next thing to heathens? If you don't feel like that why are you a parson?

BROWN (*smiling*). Do you want me to turn to souperism?

KATE. Why not? You used to rail at the Irish country gentleman and say that he was putting up no fight. What sort of a fight have you put up? If you really believed in your Protestantism you wouldn't hesitate at a trifle like souperism.

BROWN. You'll never get me to stoop to that.

KATE. Oh well, religion's not my business and I'm too fond of you to quarrel with you but you'll have to go, all you amiable Protestant parsons, and make room for parsons who believe in their religion enough to fight for souls with every weapon that God has put into their hands. If they don't come, Protestantism itself goes.

ALCOCK. It's going now.

KATE. Because the Mr. Browns are letting it slip through their fingers just as you'd let Ballydonal slip through yours.

ALCOCK. It seems to me it's been snatched.

KATE. Pooh! What's a house? Bricks and stones. Aren't there plenty of both in the world. We'll build it up again.

MRS. ALCOCK. Nonsense. Never. Not for me.

KATE. I'll build it for myself. I'll build it with my own hands if I'm put to it. I believe in Ballydonal, it's my life, it's my faith, it's my country.

ALCOCK. My dear, don't. Don't waste your life here. If you were a man, if you were Ulick, I wouldn't say a word to stop you, but a single woman!——

KATE. I must marry if I can. That's another thing Mr. Brown must look out for me; three pieces of corrugated iron and a husband, please, Mr. Brown.

BROWN. I wish I could get you the husband as easily as the other. What sort of husband do you want?

KATE. Well, I ought to marry someone like Van O'Neill but I'd like to marry wildly, out of all reason, I'd . . . like to marry a—— (*She stops.*)

MRS. ALCOCK. Well Kate, who?

KATE. No, it's a dream, it's quite impossible.

But I should like to marry a Republican Catholic curate.

MRS. ALCOCK. Kate!

KATE. I've always adored them.

(ATKINS comes in.)

ATKINS. The Goods' car is here now, sir.

MRS. ALCOCK. Thank goodness, it puts an end to this ridiculous conversation. St. Leger, wake up, come along.

ALCOCK (*getting up slowly*). Yes, I suppose so.

MRS. ALCOCK. Take my arm.

ALCOCK. My dear, you should take mine.

MRS. ALCOCK. I don't need it. Come.

ALCOCK (*as he goes out*). Bournemouth after Ballydonal!

MRS. ALCOCK. Ssh! (*They go out.*)

BROWN. I believe you mean it, Kate; I see it in your eye.

KATE. Every word of it. Go after them, I have a word to say to Atkins.

(MR. BROWN goes out.)

KATE. We're going to Cork this afternoon, Atkins, and then to England. The master will send you your money as usual. Here's something to go on with. (*She hands him a pound note.*)

ATKINS. You're going away, Miss? Ah sure, it had to be.

KATE. But in a few weeks, in a month or two, I'm coming back.

ATKINS. You're what, Miss?

KATE. Coming back to live here for good.

ATKINS. Thank God for that.

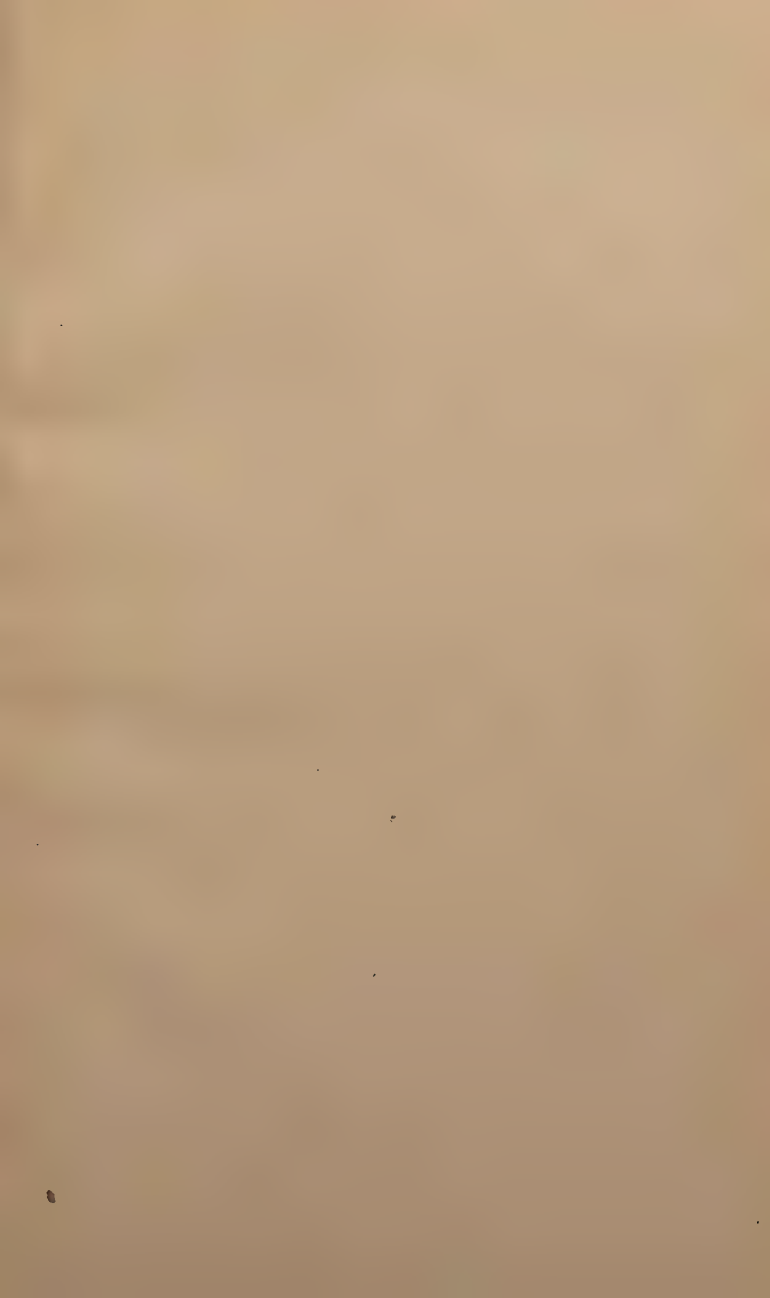
KATE. You can tell it in the village. (*She goes out.*)

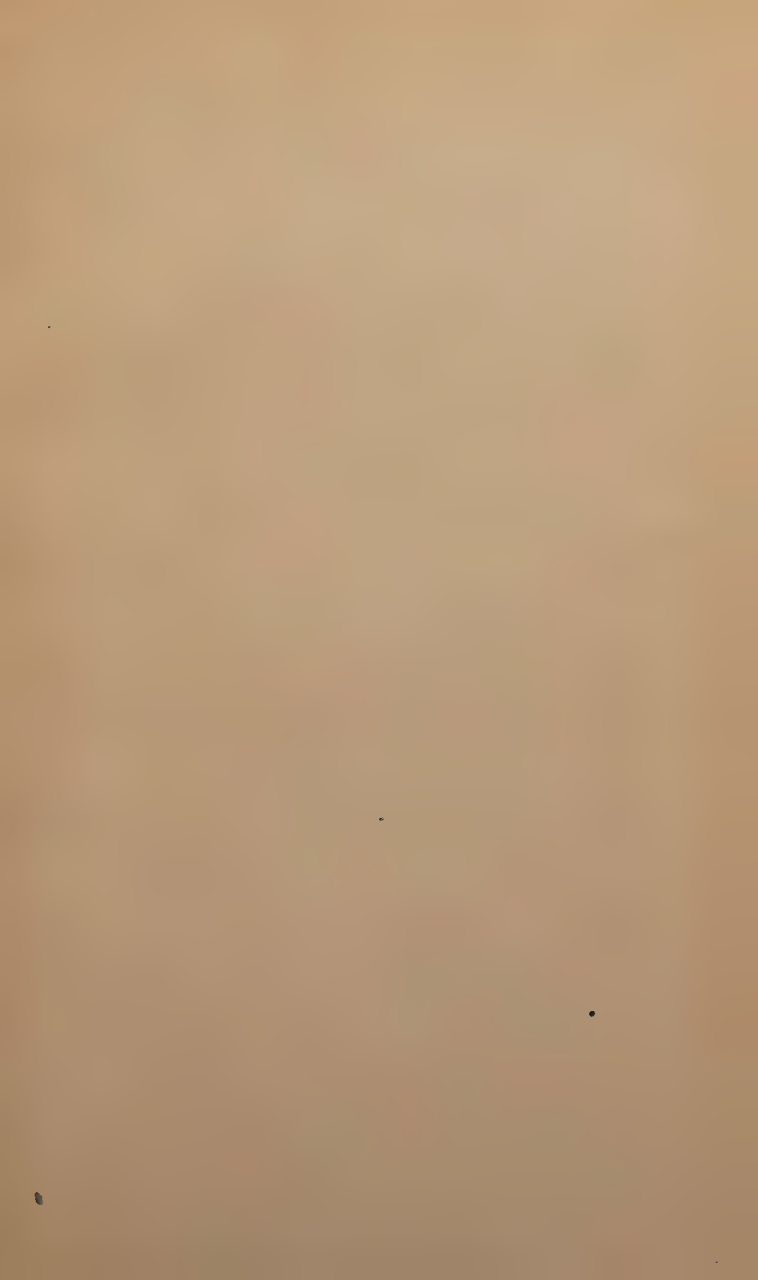
ATKINS (*looking after her*). God bless Miss Kate. (*He looks at the furniture.*) The murdering ruffians! (*He is lifting a chair into the summer-house, he drops it and starts back in terror.*) Miss Kate, Miss Kate, Miss Kate!

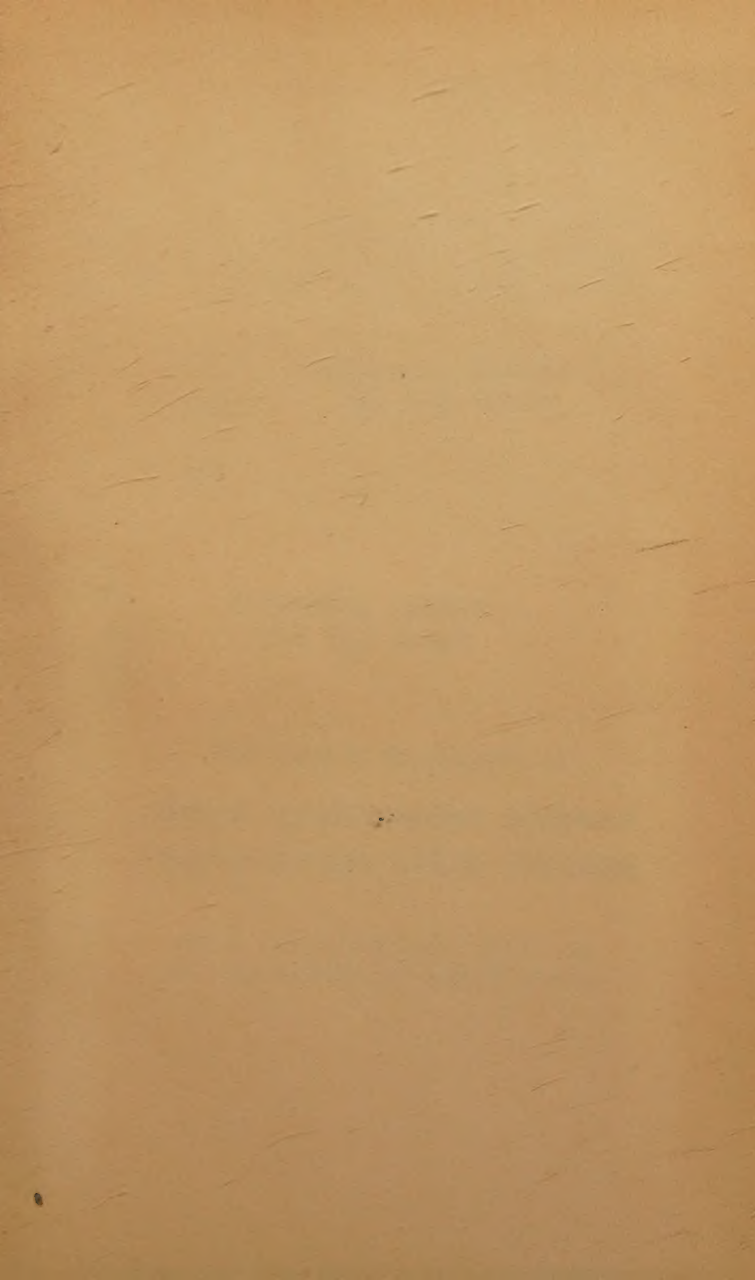
KATE (*coming back quickly*). What is it, Atkins? What's the matter?

ATKINS (*babbling*). I seen him there—in the summer-house—as clear as the day—Master Ulick—

KATE. Ulick? Go away, Atkins, go away. (*She pushes him out. She turns to the summer-house and speaks softly.*) Ulick! Are you there? . . . (*Her face lights up.*) Oh, my dear, you've come to me again, after all these years. . . . And you're smiling, so I'm right, it's what you'd have done. . . . (*A pause, she seems to listen to someone talking.*) Yes. . . . Yes. . . . So—kiss me, my dear. . . . (*She raises her face as if she were being kissed, she closes her eyes.*)







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